

Part 4: Rest and Duty

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October 18th.

That was our first Sunday in the old library downtown. That's 50 weeks of set up and tear down. Fifty Saturdays of Jonny coming in to set up the sound system. Fifty Sundays of volunteers getting to the library at 6:00am to set up chairs. Over those fifty weeks we have set up and torn down over 10,000 chairs.

Chairs which over the past week have been stacked, staged, moved, and set up right where we are today. Charis which we hope won't move for a long while.

December 5th of last year was our first work day in this building. That set the pattern for a standing workday just about every Saturday for 44 weeks. On just those Saturday work times there were conservatively 3,000 hours donated by our body and other churches. Those hours, in the general construction industry, saved the church over \$130,000. Not to mention the thousands more from Curt Bowler.

That doesn't include the cost savings from volunteers who came in during the week and on weeknights with task specific skills and gifts: helping out with IT, media, baseboards, flooring, cleaning, painting, packing, vacuuming, organizing the gym, selling old equipment online, and preparing for garage sales.

It also doesn't include donated materials and below market prices from Burt and Shane at Swank Enterprises, Great Floors, Felco Industries, Skoglund Painting and Restoration, Paul Earsley Framing and Garden City Plumbing and Heating.

After all those donations, all those hours, all those set ups and tear downs, all the pin pads locking mom's out of the crying room, all the times your kids couldn't play with Parks and Rec's toys and over a million dollars of funds raised, here we are.

Here we sit, and yet we are not done. The building isn't finished. The women have toilets but no dividers, not all our kids have classrooms, the parking lot isn't painted, the sanctuary isn't carpeted, the loan isn't paid off and the building fund isn't over.

The good news of the Bible though is that it's these moments of celebration, but not yet completion, which highlight the wonderful rest and work we have in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus meets us in the moment and gives us exactly what we need as he calls us onward.

Our passage which was read for us was a passage that stood out to me a number of months ago because in many ways the people of Israel are sitting in a very similar place we sit today. Something was drastically different, it was new, it was better, and yet it wasn't perfect, and the work wasn't over. They had found a home, and yet it was short of their forever home.

In looking at 1 Chronicles 23 today I want us to see that this moment in Sovereign Hope's history allows us the privilege to rest, but also gives us the joy we need to move forward in a markedly new way.

As we remember all that has happened to get us here, David is going to call the Levites to remember some things as well. What we are going to look at this morning are three portraits of remembrance. We are going to first, **Remember Where We Are**. Second we will **Remember Who We Are**. And lastly we will **Remember our Duty**.

So what I want to do this morning is read our passage once more and then we will begin to together turn to what God has for us in his word: **1 Chronicles 23:24-32**.

Our first point today is **Remember Where We Are**, and if we want to remember where we are, we need to first remember where we are in the story of scripture in 1 Chronicles 23.

Here's a brief history of Israel up to this point. First, God calls Abraham in Genesis 12 and promises that he will make him into his promised people and that one day God will plant the line of this nomadic drifter in the land of promise where they will be God's people in God's place, and in God's beautiful presence.

Fast forward and Abraham's children have flourished. Abraham's grandson Jacob is named Israel, he has twelve sons, and those twelve sons have become the twelve tribes of Israel. But those twelve tribes have grown multiplied in number not in the land of promise, but in the land of Pharaoh, as slaves.

They might be God's people, but they are not in God's place!

But God by the hand of Moses brings out God's people, delivers them out of their slavery and even more than this, he guides them by his very presence: fire by night and a cloud by day. They are God's people, with God's presence, but they are not in God's place.

So God leads them to the gates of the Promise Land but Israel refuses to believe that God will help them defeat the big people and tall walls of those who already occupy it. So God punishes their disbelief by causing them to wander in the desert for another forty years.

During that time God gives instructions so that even though they aren't in God's place, they can still have God's presence. He gives them the instructions for a tabernacle--a mobile tent which they can pack up and move with them which God will dwell in.

Eventually Joshua leads this nomadic people into the Promised Land and bit by bit they see God as faithful to displace the big people and tall walls which stood before them. They settle the land, and under King David they flourish as a kingdom and have military peace on every side. They are God's people, in God's place, but God's presence still dwelt in this temporary tent.

So as God established Jerusalem as his holy city, and built David a palace there, David desired to build God his place. A final place, a beautiful place, where God's people would dwell in God's place, and they would be in God's glorious presence in the temple. But God tells David that he will not be allowed to build a temple, David's son would build the temple.

This is where our story picks up today. David is nearing the end of his life and in the beginning of chapter 22 we see that he is setting his son, Solomon, up for the successful task of building God his final resting place. The crown jewel of God's promise to Abraham: God's people, in God's place, in God's presence.

So David begins to take a census of all the Levites who were called to the work of ministry and he prepares them for this new era of ministry. We read this in **1 Chronicles 23:24-28**.

Here we see this unique paradigm. What is that? That God had granted rest to his people. We had fifty weeks of setting up the library, 40 weeks of laboring on the building. But the Levites, who were called to be the ones who oversaw the worship and materials of the tabernacle, had 40 years of setting up, tearing down.

40 years of collapsing curtains, packing up altars, tearing down pole structures and hauling the Arc of the Covenant over rugged and dusty terrain.

But now, they had rest. No more mobility, no more 6am chair dates. God had promised to dwell in Jerusalem forever, he wasn't moving! God had brought them to a resting place.

But did you notice this rest was not rest from work, was it? It was a rest for work. David said that there used to be a need, but now God has provided a solution to that need. God has given Israel a central place of worship in Jerusalem.

So what does David do? He proclaims the good news of that rest, the good news of no set up and tear down, and he commissions them back to the duty of ministry. David knew two things. First he knew that this sort of ministry had no end, the work of praising God would need to continue even when God's people were in God's place in God's presence. But, second, he also knew that even though the tabernacle, the tent of meeting and the sanctuary would no longer move, he knew the temple was coming.

There was a greater glory, a greater beauty, a greater presence held out for them. In light of that, David put them to a new sort of work.

Today we find ourselves in a similar spot don't we?

We are here, but we are not yet there. We are God's people, and we have a place. We have a church building. But this is not the temple of God. This is where God promises to dwell uniquely in his gathered people. But this church, and this building is not the Kingdom of Heaven.

In fact temple wasn't even that for Israel. But one day, God acted again. As viewers in the story of scripture we assumed that it would be King Solomon, David's son, as the one who would build the true temple in which God would finally dwell among his people. But it was another son from the line of David, Jesus Christ, the Son of God who would as John tells us "tabernacle" among his people. He dwelt with us, fully God, and fully man. Paul says that in Jesus the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. And look at what Jesus calls himself in **John 2:18-22**.

Jesus the true temple is has brought us the promise of God's perfect presence and more than that, the promise of God's perfect place, the New Jerusalem which we see in **Revelation 21:2-4**.

Where are we in this story today? We are in a place where every ounce of rest we feel here, every chair we don't have to move, every nail we don't have to hammer, every dump load we don't have to take reminds us that we were built for this forever rest.

A rest purchased for us by Jesus himself. A rest which will one day be ours and ours eternally. This world always has work, but it's only the gospel which brings us rest in the midst of our work.

So we look at this gift God has given to us, and we refuse to overthink it. This church, the ministry, the relief, the shelter it provides reminds us of what lay ahead. For those of us who are visiting here today, our goal is not to get you to this tabernacle, or even this temple, it's to get you there.

Everything you want comes there. The goal of this church is to make that way clear. Come to Jesus. There is a longing to belong that is central to who we are as people. Where we belong is with Jesus.

When we come to Jesus we have a holy joy and a holy discontent. We see the rest, God has taken wanderers and slaves and made them sons and daughters. But we are sons and daughters who are eagerly awaiting the final adoption which is yet to come in the return of Jesus Christ.

But even with the present promise and the future reality of this rest, David turns us to joyful work. Why? Because that's what rested, redeemed, sons and daughters were made to do.

This is our second point today: **Remembering Who We Are.**

Of the twelve tribes of Israel the tribe of Levi was given a specific task. Aaron and Moses were both of the tribe of Levi and from Levi were the priests. There were several unique things about the Levites and one was that they didn't receive any land in Israel for their portion was from the Lord. They were to attend to all the business of worship that included the acts of offering and the details and physical operations of the tabernacle.

So even as Israel settled in Jerusalem forever, the work of the Levites didn't diminish. In fact David did something unique here. When Moses gave the law to God's people he said that Levite men over the age of thirty are the ones who would be conscribed into the work of ministry.

But did you see what David did? It actually happens in two parts. Look first at **1 Chronicles 23:2-3**. But then look here: **1 Chronicles 23:24-25**.

What happened? David lowered the age requirements for the priesthood. Why? Because God brought rest.

Now wouldn't that seem counter intuitive for us? If God has brought us rest, then wouldn't there be less work for us?

By worldly standards yes, but by God's standards the rest which the Lord brings to his people is met by a greater demand for people to aid in the worship of God.

David knew that as God's promise grew, the need for people to help with sacrifices, worship and praise would not decrease but increase. Even though the permanence of Jerusalem demanded less set up and

tear down, the flourishing promise of God assumed that more people than ever would be needed to help others find joy in God.

To be called into the priesthood was to be called into the wonderful work of joyful worship.

When Jesus came, he changed this whole structure. How? He became the sacrifice once and for all for our sins. When we sin, we no longer need to go to the Good Food Store, buy a sheep, and go to our priest to have that sacrificed. Because Jesus did what the blood of bulls and goats could never do. When you read the Old Testament and you see these sacrifices, do you realize those sacrifices are place holders? Our sin demands death, the author of Hebrews says that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness from sins. That means that every drop sacrificed on an altar it is either waiting for your blood to pay the just penalty for your sins, or it's waiting for the blood of Jesus as the substitute sacrifice for sinners. Look at what **Hebrews 10:10-14** says.

This is why it is so important that Jesus was not just a man, but was the second person of the Trinity. Jesus was uniquely suited as the true high priest to offer sacrifices on our behalf, but Jesus as the true lamb of God, was uniquely suited to die as the substitutionary sacrifice for all who believe in him. He was priest and sheep for those in need.

Jesus did away with the sacrifices by his own body. But because Jesus rose again from the dead, we no longer find ourselves unemployed and without priests. In fact look at what Peter says in **1 Peter 2:4-5**.

Who are the priests? Who are the Levites? Those who come to Jesus in faith. We are the priesthood of believers.

The rest God gives us from having to work or find our own salvation turns us to the joyful work of offering sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Yes, God prescribes to his church the office of elders and deacons, but inside these roles God gives us the universal blessing of the priesthood of all believers. Look at Paul's words in **Ephesians 4:11-12**.

We are living stones. We are lumpy and bumpy and have sharp edges. We will offend, disappoint, and get in the way of each other but it's this community which God desires to grow up together for the sake of ministry.

The rest we have in the gospel frees us for the wonderful work of ministry.

What I love about this passage in 1 Chronicles is that it acknowledges the ministry of necessity. When God's priests had to act as glorified moving men, they were no less priests. But their ministry of need, having to set up and tear down, was fueled by their ministry of duty: The Lord needed to be worshipped, that people needed to see the forgiveness offered by God himself.

We have lived in a season of need. But now that some of those needs have been met, we get to move to the joy of duty. That's what David says, there is no longer a need to carry, and now we get to turn to the duty of service. The Hebrew word for duty is actually presented twice in this text and it's in these duties that we see what our life is to look like as we turn the corner here at Sovereign Hope.

This is our final point this morning: **Remember Our Duty**.

If you noticed the writer of Chronicles includes two bookends to this text. Look with me at **1 Chronicles 23:24, 32**.

What are the bookends? The service of the house of the Lord. Which means that what we are about to read is the writer's attempt to define for us what it looks like to be in service of the House of the Lord.

In 1 Corinthians Paul calls the church of Jesus a body, and just as your body has many parts, so does the church have many parts. We all have different gifts, different passions, and different joys that God has given to us.

For some of us, you might feel that as we leave this time of setting up and tearing down that God might be taking away a place that you serve. But take heart, that this is not the end.

Just as this passage begins and ends with service in the house of the Lord, David shows us what that service is like with the Hebrew word: ma'amada. The word means to attend, or to serve, to take up a position.

How are we to serve the house of the Lord? David shows us two ways: by serving and by standing.

First ***We Serve***

Look again at **1 Chronicles 23:28-29**.

We serve the Lord, we take up our position as priests, by assisting in the labor of ministry. Even though Jesus has done away with the need for sacrifices he has not done away with the need for service.

We are to serve the Lord by caring for this building. There will be leaks that need fixed, messes that need cleaned and snow that needs shoveled. These simple acts of service are the physical needs which make the worship of the Lord possible.

We are to serve the Lord not by presenting the showbread anymore, but by making sure that everyone who comes into this place knows the true bread which has come for us in Jesus Christ.

Even though we no longer need to wash anything because in Jesus we have finally been cleansed, we have the privilege of pointing others to the washing of Jesus.

We are to serve the Lord in our giving, just as the priests kept track of the oil, and the measurements of goods which were sacrificed, we serve the Lord by giving and by stewarding the resources that God gives us.

We come to church with a distinct posture which is contrary to what is common today. Most people go to church and say: What can you offer me? Priests go to the church and say: How can I serve you?

May we be a church which seeks to serve with hospitable greeters, joyful kid's volunteers, and considerate members always looking to serve and help others hear and follow Jesus here on Sunday mornings and throughout the week.

But secondly, we serve the house of the Lord by standing: ***We Stand.***

Look with me at **1 Chronicles 23:30-32.**

What do we stand to do? We stand to worship.

We worship at night, we worship in the evening, we worship on the festivals, we worship in our community groups, we worship in the workplace, we worship on Sunday mornings.

We worship when we are reminded of our rest. We worship when weeks of sorrow and pain manifest themselves. We worship when we are content, we worship when we are crushed.

What is the crowing work of those who wish to serve the Lord? The work of worship.

This building can be many things, but without worship this building cannot be a church. We worship because for those who have been brought into the presence of this King, we see someone who cannot not be adored. We see the King of all ages who laid down his life for us, so that we might in everything joyfully, with song, with service, and with fellowship worship this King.

Look at how Paul puts this in **Romans 12:1-2.**

What drives our identity as God's people? Worship of the God who made us a people. What drives our humility as a church? The worship of a God who has sustained us through so much despite our own sin and foolishness.

What drives our mission as a church? The desire to invite others into the joyful work of worshipping the God who has done great things for us.

What guides our emotions as a church? That even though there are wonderful joys of new buildings and new births, there are better days ahead for the Lord's people. That even though there is pain, death, and emptiness, there are better days ahead for the Lord's people.

What gets us out of bed in the morning? That God might sustain my feeble frame and weightless breath to be poured out in worship.

Sovereign Hope, the need to carry and move is passing, but our work here is only beginning. Let us not bemoan what God has given us. But let us attend to one another, our brothers and sisters, for the service of the house of the Lord, and for the hope of the better realities yet to come.