

April 17

1 Chronicles 23-26

Hey everybody – Mark Ashton coming at you with the April 17<sup>th</sup> edition of Project 4:4. Today's reading, I just have to confess to you was a hard one for me. It was probably hard for you to read through and it was hard for me to put together an accelerator. I don't have a ton to say, but let me give you a few thoughts on this one.

Here's what happening here. They were actually counting and recording carefully priests, gatekeepers, singers, musicians – all these people who were divided into 24 divisions that are designed for the worship at the temple. This passage is actually a very pragmatic description of what was happening in the temple and how they were going about worship in David's time.

As a side note, these are some really cool pages in the Bible if you are trying to name a child and you're looking for good Biblical baby names. Well, these pages are full of those baby names for you to be taking a look at and probably nobody else has got those names.

Well the subject I want to talk about today is the idea of organized religion because this is actually what was happening in this passage – they were organizing their religious practices. Now in our culture, people love Jesus. Even people who don't know Jesus, think the world of him, and people love to think about him. But at the same time, people hate religion – especially organized religion. And I can understand this – because when you think about organized religion – you think about the televangelists in the 1980's and the fiscal scandals that they had in the ways that they stole money. You think about the priests' scandals and the children that were abused by them. You think about mega-church pastors that have been caught in immorality, cult leaders who are compelling atrocities with guns, drugs and teenage girls. When I think about that kind of religion, I hate it too. And I think if the truth is told, God hates that, too.

I don't think though that this is really organized religion nearly so much as it is religious abuse. That's a much better category to talk about those examples that I mentioned. Now, it should be noted that this is patently against what God calls us to do. This is anti-Jesus! It is exactly the opposite of what Jesus taught and I don't think in any way, shape or form can be considered to conform to what Christianity is all about. It is religious abuse, and I think what you would find is that God is the first and harshest against religious abuse. As a matter of fact when Jesus was here, the people who he was the harshest critic of were the Pharisees – they were the ones who loved to impose rules on other people, but didn't lift a finger to help them. And so Jesus was very against that.

Well, at some level religion needs organization and religious abuse is not organized religion. I mean, you have to ask the questions: Who's going to take their turn in

the temple? Who's going to lead the music? How long can someone be a priest? There are just certain pragmatic issues that need some sense of organization, and when things are organized, people are far less likely to be suspect to political dynamics and have their feelings being hurt because of power plays between individuals.

Well, the same way that these kinds of questions have to be asked for the priests in the temple in the Old Testament, they have to be asked today in the church – just pragmatic questions like – Where will we meet? What time will we meet? Who will lead or teach or sing in that process? The truth is that excellent organization serves people well. It doesn't need to be completely predictable – and often times you'll find that the most spiritual experiences that you have – are not the ones that are orchestrated or organized. There are great worship moments when people spontaneously get together as small groups or when individuals just have their own personal experience with God. But the truth is that God invites leaders to lead, teachers to teach, singers to sing, administrators to administrate, musicians to play, and when all of this is organized together – it's possible for more people in God's family to enjoy the giftedness of others rather than being very random and discombobulated.

Well, if this is what organized religion is, we see a precedent for it in this passage. When religion or worship services or Bible studies or corporate gatherings or serving events or caring for the poor or building hospitals or training the next generation – all of these would be considered religious activities – when those things are done with high integrity and a servant's heart – well, it's one of the greatest gifts we can give to people in order to grow their faith. I think that's one of the reasons why we find so much detail about the organization that David had in these three chapters of first Chronicles.

Well, those are my brief thoughts for today – hope that it's been a blessing to you, and I'm trusting that God is using you and the whole body of Christ organized together by the headship of Jesus to reach and teach and bless people. May God's grace be with you.