

The Life of David, 2 Samuel 6, The Dangerous Glory of God, 7/13/25

Life is full of conundrums. High school and college grads start to face one of them- The job you interview for they say- Sorry, to get this job you need experience? And you are thinking- well how do I get experience unless I get this job? Or how culture sends confusing messages like- Just be yourself—but also that you need to change. Jesus has his share as well- whoever wants to save his life must lose it.

And here's one of the deepest conundrums we face when it comes to God: The Bible presents God as both dangerously holy and unbelievably good. On one hand, He dwells in unapproachable light, He tells Moses that no one can see God and live, that he's a consuming fire... And yet, on the other hand, he tells us to draw near to him, that he gives good gifts like a father. Is God someone to fear... or someone to rejoice in? The answer, somehow... is yes. That's precisely the conundrum that David faces and that we're dropped into here in 2 Samuel 6. And while we may not solve all the mysteries we are faced with in life, or with God, today David discovers the answer and experiences real joy in the fear of the Lord, and so can we.

David again brought together all the able young men of Israel—thirty thousand. 2 He and all his men went to Baalah in Judah to bring up from there the ark of God,

which is called by the Name, the name of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim on the ark.

For some of us most of what we know about the Ark of the Covenant comes from Indiana Jones. The Ark wasn't just a prop in a biblical relic hunt—it was the visible throne of the invisible God, the most concentrated symbol of God's presence, power, and holiness. The Ark of the Covenant has its origin in the Exodus, where God instructs Moses to build a 4ft x 2ft x 2ft box made of acacia wood, overlaid with pure gold inside and out. Topped with a golden "mercy seat", flanked by two cherubim (angels) facing inward. **Let me show you a picture** Inside the ark were the stone tables of the Ten Commandments, Aaron's rod that budded, and a jar of manna. All symbols of God's holy presence and covenant with his people.

The ark was supposed to be kept in the Tabernacle, the house of worship, and specifically in the Holy of Holies, the inner room where the glorious presence of God would dwell. But this is not where it was, why? Well many years prior to this, Israel was fighting a battle against the Philistines. And they thought, well, I don't know how this battle is going to go, but to stack our odds on our side, if we could go up and bring the ark of the covenant down into this valley and have it on our side, that probably would win the battle. So they saw the ark of the covenant, not as a place where God meets with his people, but as a lucky charm. An interesting turn of events, the Philistines actually won the battle. They captured the ark of the covenant, and they brought it into Philistine country, as spoils of victory, but it caused all sorts of problems for the Philistines, including tumors breaking out on their bodies like its radioactive. So they put it on a cart, sent it back to Israel. And eventually, it ends up at a guy's house named Abinadab out in the country where it stayed for 20 years until 2 Samuel 6.

In the meantime, David is now the king and he wants the Ark back in Jerusalem because he wants to restore the worship and presence of God among the people. David wanted to turn the portable tabernacle into a permanent place of worship in Jerusalem. David so desired to be in the presence of God and He wanted his people not just to know about God, but to know and experience the blessing of God's presence.

So David takes 30,000 young men...you say, wow did he expect to run into a fight? No, this was a massive parade processional. This was a time for celebration and worship, look at v. **5 David and all Israel were celebrating with all their might before the LORD, with castanets, harps, lyres, timbrels, sistrums and cymbals.** In other words various drums and percussion and guitars. These were the same instruments that they worshipped with in the temple. So just in case you think you can only worship with pianos and organs and brass...apparently David disagrees. Snarky.

Everyone is caught up in celebration and worship...and then disaster strikes. **3 Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, were guiding the new cart 4 with the ark of God on it, and Ahio was walking in front of it.**

6 When they came to the threshing floor of Nakon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled.

7 The LORD's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down, and he died there beside the ark of God. Imagine in a moment all this celebration coming to a screeching halt, drowned out by the deafening silence and terror.

And here's what many people just can't accept about the God of the Bible. Uzzah's actions seem very understandable, even well-meaning, he thinks the ark might fall in the dirt and so he puts his hand on it, which sure, he's not supposed to do, but shouldn't God understand the situation? Apparently not. God strikes him down, isn't this capricious of God? What kind of God is this?

But this is a misunderstanding of the situation. First of all, Uzzah should have never been in the position where this could happen because God gave very specific instructions in Exodus and Numbers when it came to handling the Ark. First of all, only Levites (the priests of Israel) were to transport the Ark, and when they did, it wasn't supposed to be on an ox cart, that's how the pagan Philistines transported it, not how God's people were to do it. It was supposed to be carried on poles on the shoulders of the Levites.

Ok, but you say, why all these weird rules? What's the big deal? Well God has very good reasons for his rules. In fact, not only with the Ark, but all through the Old Testament with all these cleanliness and purification and worship rituals and rules, God is trying to communicate one very important message that is fundamental and crucial to understand. The message is this- "I'm holy and glorious, you are sinful. And your sin isn't just a little problem, it's serious, because I'm so gloriously holy that you in your state of being can't be in my presence, it's just

too dangerous.” Just as a base and acid cannot exist together. One will consume the other.¹ God is a consuming fire the Bible says. These rules are for the gracious protection of people from God’s dangerously perfect holiness.

You say, well I don’t like that God is like this...But we accept this about the sun don’t we? We love the goodness of the sun. We would not exist without it, we love the warmth that provides, we’ve had so many rainy days we miss it when it’s not out, we love the beauty and brightness of sunsets and sunrises, we love getting a tan at the beach. It gives us vitamins. The sun is great! AND the sun is dangerous. There are rules in how we interact with the sun. You can’t look directly at it, or you can damage your eyes, we can’t have too much unprotected exposure to the sun, too much time can dehydrate us, not to mention we have to keep at a safe distance or it would fry us and everything that exists. If this is true with the sun, how much more with God, the father of lights, the creator of the billions of suns in the galaxy who can hold them all in the span of his hands, how much more is he good, but dangerous if we don’t follow how he tells us to interact with him to protect ourselves.

When David did what he did by not following the rules, what Uzzah did when he touched it is they rejected the fundamental principle of the entire Bible and Christianity- God is holy and your sin is serious. David and Uzzah rejected this. Uzzah thought the dirt on the ground would defile the ark, but touching it would not, but the dirt had never rebelled and sinned against God—he had. That shows he doesn’t understand the holiness of God and his sinfulness. He thought he’s good enough. Many of us are just like David and Uzzah. Like a sound board- we turn up the levels of our inherent goodness and we turn down the levels of God’s holiness. But God is showing us throughout the Bible that God is far more holy than we ever imagined and we are far more sinful than we dared to believe. Until we come to understand this we are lightyears from a safe and saving relationship with the living God.

How does David respond? **8 Then David was angry because the LORD’s wrath had broken out against Uzzah, and to this day that place is called Perez Uzzah.**

9 David was afraid of the LORD that day and said, “How can the ark of the LORD ever come to me?”

10 He was not willing to take the ark of the LORD to be with him in the City of David. What was David angry about? Maybe the whole situation, and he’s wrestling with the very same conundrum with God that we have, which leads him to the million \$ question he asks “How can the Ark ever come to me?” If God is like this, how can anyone be in his presence if we are so sinful? But it’s the best question he could have asked because it leads him to unlock the answer. And this is the same question that gets us to the good news of the Gospel! Much like surgery, you have to get cut open before you are healed. We must first realize our condition is worse than we dare imagine. You’ve got to get the bad news, but God doesn’t want to keep us there, and doesn’t keep David there, because there is gloriously good news.

¹ Thanks Tim Keller for this imagery. <https://gospelinlife.com/sermon/david-and-the-ark/>

V.10 Instead, he took it to the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. Obed-Edom's house is nearby, and he's most likely a levite (the priest class), and so they say, let's drop it off here. In their eyes, this is not a gift...this was like putting a nuclear reactor in someone's backyard. Maybe he said, NO! And they said YES!

11 The ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite for three months, and the LORD blessed him and his entire household. Contrary to what David expected, no one is dead, no one has tumors...the opposite is true. The blessing and goodness of God was present with Obed-Edom and David hears about it. David has experienced the danger of God's glory, but now he sees it's possible to experience the goodness of God's glory at the same time. How? This is what C.S. Lewis is trying to convey about God in the famous scene from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Early in the book, Mr. and Mrs. Beaver describe Aslan the lion to the children. Mrs. Beaver says if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking they are braver than most or else just silly. So Lucy asks if he's safe. Mr. Beaver replies, "Safe? Who said anything about safe? Of course he isn't safe. But he's good." But how do you live with a dangerous but good lion let alone God?

Well, David learned the lesson, and God revealed the answer to David as David went back to the Word of God, the Law of God, and had a pivotal "Aha!" moment. **V.12 So David went to bring up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with rejoicing.** (Not fear and terror...how???) **13 When those who were carrying the ark of the LORD had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf.**

14 Wearing a linen ephod, David was dancing before the LORD with all his might,

15 while he and all Israel were bringing up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets. David got out the Bible and made sure he did it exactly as God commanded. He got the Levites from Obed-Edom's household, he got the poles, and made sure they carried it right. Obedience...but notice what else. David is wearing a linen ephod- this was a priest's undergarment. David, takes on the role of a priest, what does he do? After 6 steps...7 is a perfect, holy number- the number of God, they sacrificed a bull and calf. Why?

In the Holy of Holies where the ark was to dwell, between the High Priest and the ark is a place of sacrifice. A pure sacrifice had to be made in order for the priest to enter the presence of God to atone for the sins of the people for that year. By the priest putting his hand on the animal and killing it, he identifies with it for him personally and as a representative for the people. He's saying "This should be me, this is us, this is what our sin deserves before a holy God." It's only through sacrifice that God's dangerous holiness can dwell with sinful people not in wrath, but in goodness, and mercy, and blessing. David finally understood this. And this is why David was rejoicing and worshipping God with all his might- not as a king, but as a humble, undeserving sinner saved and welcomed into the good presence of God by the sacrifice of another. .

This is as far as we're going to go in the story, let's talk about us. You might say, "We've seen the movie, we all know that the ark is in a crate somewhere in a secret government facility, so what does all this have to do with me?" Two thoughts- One about obedience and one about sacrifice.

Obedience: You know those little books that are made for the bathroom? Well back in the 90s there was a popular one called, “Don’t sweat the small stuff...” and the subtitle was “and it’s all small stuff.” Every time I looked at this book, I would have a reaction, and it’s the same one I have today. That’s just not true. Not everything is small stuff. And David realized that is especially true when it comes to the truth and holiness of God.²

David learned that God’s holiness is to be taken seriously. Proverbs says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. There is a flippancy today even among Christians when it comes to holiness. There is a sentiment today that God only cares about your sincerity, not truth. Your good intentions, but not direct obedience to his commands. But God cares about what we believe AND what we do.

We must accept who God is on his terms in the Bible, not ours. Have you ever seen one of those stories of people driving through the front of a store because they were following their GPS? They got themselves into a serious problem because they failed to align themselves with reality. That driver can’t get mad at GPS, or the store as if it was in the wrong place, they were the problem! If you refuse to accept the reality of who God is and wreck your life and then get mad at God. If you refuse to see God as merciful- you will be destroyed by guilt. If you refuse to see God as love you will be destroyed by cold duty or fear. If you refuse to see God as holy, then you will ultimately be destroyed by your own pride and perceived goodness like Uzzah. Because God is who he is. We must accept who God is on his terms, not ours.

But we also must accept what God says about morality and obey him. Obey what he commands, when it comes to God’s moral vision for our sex life, our integrity in how you conduct your business and treat others that aren’t like you, how we use our money and possessions, and how you conduct yourself on social media, and what you watch and what you listen to. **Where does the holiness and fear of the Lord need to purify your beliefs about God and obedience to God?**

Here’s the second thought- about sacrifice. We face the same dilemma as David- How can the presence of God be with me in blessing, in goodness? One of the **great tensions of the Bible: that you can't live with God and you can't live without him.** He is the holy God who might break out against us because of our sin, like he did with Uzzah. But he's also the good God who blesses Obed-Edom and gives grace to David by his presence. And like Uzzah, we aren’t going to always get this obedience thing right. We’re going to slip up. So are we just supposed to try hard to be good and avoid God’s lightning bolts? That’s how some people think about God. But that’s not a relationship is it?

What resolves this tension? sacrifice. The bull and calf were not an end to themselves, they pointed beyond themselves a far greater, more permanent sacrifice, to Jesus. Hebrews 9 tells us that the blood of animals can’t take away sin permanently, but the once for all sacrifice of Jesus did. At the cross, God’s dangerous holiness broke out against the beloved one Jesus in our place

² Helpful illustration from Lon Solomon-<https://www.lonsolomonministries.com/media/j68h97c/doing-it-god-s-way>

so that we could come into his holy presence forever with great joy. So we don't need an ark and we don't need sacrifices any more. We can experience the presence of God in his mercy, grace, forgiveness, and blessing, we can be fully accepted and loved as a son and daughter of God. We can now dwell with us and in us forever if and only if, we, like David, embrace the sacrifice of the Son!

What did David do when he realized this? *David danced before the LORD with all his might.* Childlike abandonment like it's Christmas morning in your PJs. Not fear, not dread...A grown man, a king even...but he had this pure freedom.

And if David danced with great joy, how much more should we? Jesus says, in John 8- If the Son has set you free, you are free indeed.