

2 SAMUEL 6:5-11
MEN WHOM GOD KILLED!
COMPLACENCY KILLS!

“David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the LORD, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals. And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God. And David was angry because the LORD had broken out against Uzzah. And that place is called Perez-uzzah to this day. And David was afraid of the LORD that day, and he said, ‘How can the ark of the LORD come to me?’ So, David was not willing to take the ark of the LORD into the city of David. But David took it aside to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. And the ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months, and the LORD blessed Obed-edom and all his household.”¹

People were worshipping with genuine enthusiasm—truly celebrating before the LORD! There was laughter, music, singing, dancing. The congregation, at least thirty thousand men, was marked by joy—rapturous, untrammelled joy. The dulcet sounds of lyres and harps harmonised with the mournful sound of trumpets as tambourines and cymbals kept time [cf. 1 CHRONICLES 13:8]. The king himself was leading the festivities, dancing with all his might, when suddenly, the oxen stumbled.

It was only a momentary slip of the beasts’ feet, but it was enough to rock the Ark which was on the cart they were pulling. Almost automatically, the priest driving the cart reached back to steady the Ark so it wouldn’t fall; but the moment he touched the Ark, he fell dead. Everything changed in that one moment. Those who had been blowing the trumpets lowered the instruments, shocked at what had just taken place. The fingers of those who had been strumming the strings of lyres and harps stopped, their fingers frozen and no longer dancing across the strings. The cymbals and tambourines hung loosely from hands as the dancers ceased their lively steps. Everyone stared silently; God had struck Uzzah dead.

WORSHIP THE LORD IN THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS — “David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the LORD, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals” [2 SAMUEL 6:5]. For seven months, the Ark of the Covenant had been held by the Philistines as a trophy of war. These warlike coastal peoples had defeated Israel in battle, capturing the Ark of the Covenant [see 1 SAMUEL 4:1-11]. The Ark was kept as a prize of conquest, but the Philistines grew most uncomfortable with this symbol of the LORD God in their midst.

Strange things happened in Ashdod where the Ark was brought to the city. The Ark was set in the Temple of Dagon, but each morning the idol of Dagon was toppled from its base and found face down. Then, the idol was desecrated, the head and hands cut off and deliberately placed on the threshold of the Temple. It was unnerving how this kept happening. On top of that, the people in the city of Ashdod suffered with unexplained tumours. So, the Ark was sent to Gath so people in that community could also enjoy the spoils of war [see 1 SAMUEL 5:1-8].

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

2 SAMUEL 6:5-11 COMPLACENCY KILLS!

The people of Gath were quite excited for a short while, until the hand of the Lord broke out against them as had happened in Ashdod [see 1 SAMUEL 5:9]. An outbreak of tumours among the citizens convinced the people of Gath that this war prize should be shared with Ekron; so the Ark was sent to Ekron, eliciting the excited response from the city fathers, “They have brought around to us the Ark of the God of Israel to kill us and our people” [see 1 SAMUEL 5:10, 11].

The Philistines were not stupid; they realised that everywhere the Ark of the Covenant was kept as a prize of war, people died. So, they determined to send the Ark back to Israel with what they hoped would be appropriate gifts to show their contrition for having seized the Ark. Placing the Ark on a cart drawn by two milk cows whose calves were penned up. The cows, driven onward by an unseen hand, drew the cart until it had entered Israel, lowing for their calves all the while. The Philistines sent men to watch until the cart had reached Beth-shemesh, a Levitical community situated in Naphtali and on the border of Israel and Philistia.

For seven months, the Ark had been held as a prize of war; at last, the Ark was again in Israel. However, even on Israelite soil the Ark was terrifying to those holding it. God struck down seventy men from Beth-shemesh because they looked into the Ark [see 1 SAMUEL 6:19]. These men were curious; their curiosity led them to peer into the Ark and it cost them their lives. Again, the inhabitants of this border community had enough spiritual perspicuity to know that the Ark could prove dangerous to the health of the community. What if a child peeked into the Ark? “So, they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim, saying, ‘The Philistines have returned the Ark of the LORD. Come down and take it up to you’” [1 SAMUEL 6:20].

The divine text informs us, “The men of Kiriath-jearim came and took up the ark of the LORD and brought it to the house of Abinadab on the hill. And they consecrated his son Eleazar to have charge of the ark of the LORD” [1 SAMUEL 7:1]. For seven decades, the Ark would bless the household of Abinadab while unavailable as a symbol of God’s presence with His people. After seventy years, David determined to bring the Ark of the LORD to Jerusalem. He gathered thirty thousand men, an army of chosen men, to accompany the Ark on its journey of return to the centre of national worship as it had been before being captured by the Philistines. The men who accompanied David to bring the Ark to Jerusalem were drawn from every corner of the nation, from “the Nile of Egypt to Lebo-hamath” [1 CHRONICLES 13:5].

When the Ark was captured by the Philistines, the wife of Phinehas, pregnant and about to give birth, named her child “Ichabod,” because she said, “The glory has departed from Israel” [1 SAMUEL 4:22]. Now, at long last, David was determined to return “the glory” to Israel. It is quite possible that his motives were mixed—each of us struggles to maintain pure motives. David had designated Jerusalem as his capital. Perhaps returning the Ark was in part a political move to give Jerusalem a measure of status in the eyes of all Israel. In bringing the Ark to the city, David would exalt Jerusalem as both the political and the religious capital of the nation.²

Endeavouring to lift this move from a pedestrian affair, David gathered thirty thousand “chosen men of Israel.” David had used much smaller groups of warriors to win victories for Israel. Note the word “again” in verse one; this word hearkens back to 2 SAMUEL 5:1, 3 where we read that “all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron” and that “all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron.” The celebrants during this move were more than David had used to take Jerusalem from the Jebusites [2 SAMUEL 5:6] or to defeat the Philistines in the two most recent battles [2 SAMUEL 5:17-25]. This emphasises that the move David proposed was of greater importance to all Israel than had been the battles he fought for the nation.

² See John Goldingay, **1 and 2 Samuel for Everyone: A Theological Commentary on the Bible, Old Testament for Everyone** (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY and SPCK, London, 2011) 130-131

2 SAMUEL 6:5-11

COMPLACENCY KILLS!

The Ark of the Covenant was to be brought to Jerusalem for the first time. This Ark was the symbol of God's covenant with the people of Israel; it represented God's promises to His people and the obligations they had accepted in order to enter into this relationship with Him. God did not have, and has never had, a covenant with any other people in history. For this reason, to this day it is extremely foolish for any geo-political entity to set itself against Israel. In fighting against Israel, a nation or a religion will be fighting against the Living God.

For seventy years, the Ark had resided at Kiriath-jearim, about nine miles west of Jerusalem. It could be moved to the nation's new capital in one day easily. David arranged to place the Ark on a cart driven by two sons of Abinadab—the Ark had been kept in the house of Abinadab for these many years. The cart arrives, the Ark is carried out and placed on the cart, Uzzah and Ahio take their place to drive the cart and a joyous celebration begins. There is dancing, joyful music, tambourines, castanets and cymbals to keep time; we can almost hear the shouts of joy. Unlike the solemn moments we often call “worship” in this day, this is a celebration of joy! And people from all over Israel are caught up in celebrating. Joy spreads like sunlight chasing the darkness from an inner room as the shades are lifted in the early morning. Dancing and joyous shouts spread like a contagion until all seemed to be caught up in the moment. Celebration? This is what celebration looks like—spontaneous, noisy, rapturous!

This occasion was a transition—Israel was looking back at the past and simultaneously looking forward to the future. God had met Moses on Mount Sinai, sending Him to Egypt with the demand that Pharaoh set Israel free. God had promised that He would be with the nation to guide them to the land that He had promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God did accompany Israel, and He said that He would dwell above the Mercy Seat, between the cherubs crafted on the lid of the Ark, the chest that symbolised His covenant with Israel. Now, with the return of the Ark the nation would look forward to God's blessing from Jerusalem. Looking back, Israel could recognise God's faithfulness; looking forward, Israel would realise that they were to live by faith. God had acted in faithfulness in the past; henceforth, Israel would live by faith.

THERE IS ALWAYS A CLUMSY OX — “When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon ... the oxen stumbled” [2 SAMUEL 6:6]. The oxen are urged on and the cart begins to roll forward. It came to an unnamed threshing floor, a threshing floor that would soon acquire another, darker name. The previous name has been relegated to a forgotten memory of happier days; now, it will hereafter be known as “the threshing floor of Nacon.” “A proper translation would suggest that this is “the threshing floor of the stroke” or “the threshing floor of destruction.”³

It doesn't seem all that significant when we first read the words, but the text informs us, “When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon ... the oxen stumbled” [2 SAMUEL 5:6]. Approaching a threshing floor, there was a bump in the road, or perhaps it was a slight dip; in retrospect, it was an otherwise insignificant rough spot in the road. The oxen stumbled and the cart rocked, giving a momentary lurch. It is probably that no one actually noticed that the cart swayed, except for the priest who was driving the cart. Feeling the movement of the cart, his quick response was meant to ensure that the precious cargo didn't fall off and onto the ground. Without a second thought, Uzzah reached out to steady the Ark. If you hadn't been watching at that precise moment, you would never have noticed the action. Thanks to Uzzah's action, no harm was done; the Ark was steadied and remained on the cart. So, the celebration could continue and the procession could move forward toward Jerusalem.

³ T. Boston Johnstone, **Analysis of the Second Book of Samuel with Notes Critical, Historical and Geographical** (John Heywood, London 1885) 142

2 SAMUEL 6:5-11
COMPLACENCY KILLS!

At least, you might imagine that the raucous celebrations would continue. But, matters were about to take a turn for the worse, at least for Uzzah. What was about to happen would have a lasting impact on David and all Israel. God was about to teach the people a serious lesson—a lesson we have perhaps forgotten in this day.

DON'T TOUCH THE ARK — “When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God” [2 SAMUEL 6:6, 7]. Focus again on the sixth and seventh verses. Uzzah died because of one admittedly thoughtless gesture.

Picture the scene! The cart sways, the Ark could have fallen to the ground, but it didn't fall, thanks to Uzzah. Suddenly, the music stopped, the procession shuffled to a stop and people stared, dumbfounded! Literally, “there, beside the Ark” was the body of Uzzah. Undoubtedly, there was confusion and unanswered questions as the death of this priest was bruited outward from the centre of the congregation. The knowledge of what had happened placed a damper on the crowd like storm clouds blotting out the sun. What had happened? Why had it happened?

Perhaps there were some present that day with long memories; they would have been able to recall an incident that had occurred when the Ark had first been returned to Israel. I have told you how the men of Beth-shemesh had been judged by God. Seventy men from Beth-shemesh were struck down, killed, because their curiosity led them to look into the Ark [see 1 SAMUEL 6:19]. They had only peeked! Yet, their curiosity resulted in severe and swift judgement. Their judgement should have served as a warning for all Israel to respect the things of God. At that time, the men of Beth-shemesh cried out, “Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God” [1 SAMUEL 6:20]? Indeed! Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God? Overwhelmed with fear, the people of Beth-shemesh had sent the Ark of the LORD to Kiriath-jearim. They understood that the judgement they had witnessed had been God's doing.

While the judgement the worshippers had just witnessed was not as severe as the judgement on the men of Beth-shemesh, Uzzah now lay dead beside the Ark of the Covenant. What wasn't immediately clear was why Uzzah had to die. All that the people knew, and all we are told in the text, is that “God struck [Uzzah] down because of his error.” We are left to wonder what his error might have been. In fact, that Hebrews word rendered “error” in my translation is very difficult to translate into English. It only occurs once in the Bible, and that is in this seventh verse. Other translators have spoken of judgement on Uzzah because of his irreverence⁴, of his negligence⁵, his impudent action⁶ or his rash act⁷. Yet, others refuse to translate the word, speaking nebulously of “what he did”⁸ or speak of him reaching out his hand⁹.

Let's give Uzzah the benefit of the doubt—he meant well. However, good intentions do not count for fulfilling the will of God. Uzzah was intent on seeing that God was not dishonoured by allowing the Ark to topple off the cart. But that was a serious problem. The Ark of the Covenant was never meant to be transported on a cart. God had given specific instructions of the manner in which the Ark of the LORD was to be transported.

⁴ Holman Christian Standard Version, New American Standard Version

⁵ NET Bible First Edition

⁶ Revised English Bible

⁷ New English Bible

⁸ New Century Version

⁹ New Revised Standard Version

2 SAMUEL 6:5-11 COMPLACENCY KILLS!

The sons of Kohath were “charged with the service of the holy things which were to be carried on the shoulder” [NUMBERS 7:9]. “The holy things” included “the Ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the vessels of the sanctuary... the screen” [NUMBERS 3:31]. Moses provides a detailed and specific statement of the duties of the sons of Kohath, instructing them how they were to take down the veil masking the Ark as they assembled all the holy items for transport. Then, Moses, writing under the guidance of the LORD God, concludes his instruction by stating, “When Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, as the camp sets out, after that the sons of Kohath shall come to carry these, but they must not touch the holy things, lest they die. These are the things of the tent of meeting that the sons of Kohath are to carry” [NUMBERS 4:15]. Priests that are descendants of Kohath were to carry these items—no other priests are permitted to carry these items. Moreover, these priests, when carrying the Ark and the holy items, “must not touch the holy things, lest they die.” Uzzah’s ignorance killed him!

Still, we read of the incident and wonder what was it about the Ark that was so important that God would kill someone who touched it, even unconsciously and certainly in innocence? There was nothing special about the construction of the Ark. The materials used were quite ordinary, and the craftsmanship, while no doubt excellent, was not exceptional. However, we make such statements without considering Who dwelt above the cherubim.

The Ark symbolised the presence of the Living God with His chosen people. It is somewhat like the elements of the Lord’s Table. We hear the words read on a regular basis as we come to the Communion Meal; but we must avoid falling into the error of performing a ritual rather than worshipping. This is the reason Paul concludes the instructions concerning what we do with these words, “Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world” [1 CORINTHIANS 11:28-32].

The evidence of God’s holiness is hiding in plain sight; we witness God’s holiness when Paul writes, “That’s why so many of you even now are listless and sick, and others have gone to an early grave” [1 CORINTHIANS 11:30, THE MESSAGE]. Treating God as though He is incidental to life, as though He is just like us, as though He needs our help, is a dangerous step for us to take. Looking again at Uzzah’s act, the account immediately suggests several cautions.

Uzzah—to say nothing of David, who initiated the move—failed to acquaint themselves with God’s instructions concerning how the LORD was to be treated. At the least, God’s judgement of Uzzah warns Christians against any attempt to promote His cause through unholy means. Our responsibility is to do what is right; God will guard His Name, His honour and His cause. This issue is more vital than we might imagine. Perhaps this would be an appropriate time to address the issue, fixing it firmly in the minds of those who hear today.

God is gracious. When preaching in the midst of the Areopagus, the Apostle Paul reminded the listening Athenians that, “The times of ignorance God overlooked” [see ACTS 17:30]. Perhaps, if an individual has never heard of God, or if an individual has never known the holy and just demands of the Living God, that person might claim ignorance. In that instance, God may overlook the transgression, the insult against holiness that is committed; the individual did not know. However, once the mind of God has been revealed, whether through reading His Word or through hearing an exposition of the Word of God, an individual becomes responsible for how he or she approaches the Living God.

2 SAMUEL 6:5-11 COMPLACENCY KILLS!

This matter is pointedly demonstrated when the LORD God speaks to Ezekiel, saying, “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die for his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul. Again, if a righteous person turns from his righteousness and commits injustice, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die. Because you have not warned him, he shall die for his sin, and his righteous deeds that he has done shall not be remembered, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the righteous person not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning, and you will have delivered your soul” [EZEKIEL 3:17-21].

I have been challenged at various times by individuals questioning why the preacher would speak against specific sins. The reason for speaking against particular sins is that the one who stands in Christ’s stead bears responsibility to warn of the consequences of sin.

“Why not let people continue in ignorance,” some may wonder. “If God overlooks sins or transgressions committed in ignorance, shouldn’t we just allow them to continue in their error?” The question is often asked in the context of sending missionaries to those who are unaware of the grace of God in Christ the Lord. The response to the query is two-fold. We are commanded to be witnesses of what we know to be true. The Master, prior to His ascension commanded, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” [MATTHEW 28:19, 20a].

The other response is that we are a compassionate people; we seek God’s best for all mankind. We dare not remain silent, lest we deprive others of the mercy of God and His rich blessings. Peter has written, “Set Christ apart as Lord in your hearts and always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks about the hope you possess” [1 PETER 3:15]. Living godly, holy lives, Christians will attract the attention of outsiders. Some of that attention will be hostile, belligerent or even pugnacious; however, a godly life will draw people to ask why we live as we do. When people ask, and they will ask, we are responsible to point them to the grace of God.

When Uzzah reached out to steady the Ark, he was suggesting that God needed help. This was the Ark; this was where the Living God dwelt above the Mercy Seat. As I have already stressed at other points in this message, the Ark of the Covenant was the symbol of God’s presence with Israel. The point to take to heart is that God is well able to protect Himself. We are to act according to His will; He will care for Himself. When David at last had the Ark carried to Jerusalem on the shoulders of the descendants of Kohath, we read, “Because God helped the Levites who were carrying the ark of the covenant of the LORD, they sacrificed seven bulls and seven rams” [1 CHRONICLES 15:26]. God helped the Levites; they didn’t help Him!

Christians are tempted to defend God. However, it is those who have no confidence in their god who would defend that god. After Gideon had destroyed the altar of Baal and cut down the Asherah beside it, the men of the town were incensed—someone had cut down their god! When these men discovered that it was Gideon who had performed this deed, they demanded of Joash, Gideon’s father, “Bring out your son, that he may die, for he has broken down the altar of Baal and cut down the Asherah beside it” [JUDGES 6:30]. Gideon’s father responded, quite sensibly, “Will you contend for Baal? Or will you save him? ... If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because his altar has been broken down” [JUDGES 6:31].

2 SAMUEL 6:5-11

COMPLACENCY KILLS!

Adherents of religions with neither theological nor rational depth respond with choler to any challenge to the group-think defining the practitioners of those various religions. Throughout history, even to this day, religionists have been easily incited to attack any who disagreed with them because they feel they must defend their god. Whether Muslims beheading Christians who refuse the tenets of Islam, or Hindus burning Christians alive because they worship the Son of God, or secularists haling Christians before human rights tribunals because the cultural religion of secularism has been defied, all alike are fearful that their god cannot stand in the marketplace of ideas. Do not imagine that Christians must defend the Living God—He will defend Himself. It is those who depend on rite and ritual, cant and creed, that react to every slight by jumping to the defence of their god.

We need to hear again the promise of the Risen Son of God as He encourages His witnesses, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” [MATTHEW 28:20b]. Again, Jesus promised His disciples, “Where two or three are gathered in My Name, there am I among them” [MATTHEW 18:20].

On one occasion, while waiting on his colleagues to join him in Corinth, Paul appears to have questioned what God was doing. Look at the account provided in the Acts. “When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’ And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people’” [ACTS 18:5-10].

The Lord encouraged the Apostle by informing him that he was in the right place and doing the right thing. The opposition he was then experiencing, the pushback he was receiving from those who felt hurt by his preaching, was to be expected because he was assailing the stronghold of the evil one. However, even in the midst of the citadel of the devil, God had laid claim to many then living in Corinth. I must believe that the Lord has laid claim to many living in this community and in the communities surrounding us. Our responsibility is to be faithful to Him, and in our faithfulness to continue speaking.

We must not seek to harm anyone deliberately, but neither may we be silent concerning wickedness. We must not speak with anger concerning any individual or group, even when their actions are abhorrent or reprehensible; in love, we must warn sinners and point them to the freedom that is found only in Christ Jesus as Lord. While we live in a world that is determined to label every form of speech that they find objectionable as hateful, the Christian must ensure that his or her language is the language of Zion, marked by grace as he or she proclaims the mercy of God and warns that the Living God hold all people to account. This is not hateful; rather, this is demonstration of the love that is absent from this dying world.

THE IMPACT OF DIVINE JUDGEMENT — “David was afraid of the LORD that day, and he said, ‘How can the ark of the LORD come to me?’ So, David was not willing to take the ark of the LORD into the city of David. But David took it aside to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. And the ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months, and the LORD blessed Obed-edom and all his household” [2 SAMUEL 6:9-11].

Shock was written large on the faces of many that day. No doubt there was genuine grief experienced by some; and many must have been fearful, wondering if others would be killed. The divine text informs us of the feelings of only one person, and that is David. God was angry. Likewise, David was angry. However, David's anger quickly turned to fear. What a flood of emotion swept over the king that day. It is important to note that David's anger was not directly toward the LORD—he was angered *because* of what the Lord had done [see 2 SAMUEL 6:8]. David hated what had happened; he did not hate the LORD. The world is easily confused about actions and motives, frequently ascribing evil motives to any action challenging their personal desires.

We read in the text, “David was angry because the LORD had broken out against Uzzah” [2 SAMUEL 6:8]. This is an echo of another time when the LORD had broken out against a people. The fifth chapter of this book tells of a time when God had delivered the Philistines into David's hands. In that earlier account, we read, “David defeated [the Philistines] there. And he said, ‘The LORD has broken through my enemies before me like a breaking flood’” [2 SAMUEL 5:20]. David named the threshing floor where Uzzah was killed “Perez-uzzah”—“bursting out against Uzzah.” He named the place where God had broken out against the Philistines “Baal-perazim”—“Lord of bursting through.”¹⁰ It is almost as though David had determined that God would only do what David thought best and not what brought God glory.

Perhaps David was not so different from many professing Christians in this day. We are conditioned by our culture to see God as a commodity to be used for our benefit. Are we ill? We pray that God will heal us, delivering us from all discomfort. What if God has a vital lesson for us to learn while we are in the valley of despair? Should we not rather pray, “Not my will, but Yours?” Should we not ask what God would have us learn while we are confined to the bed of weakness? There are some lessons that can be learned only through weakness. I recommend that we learn to hear the voice of the Lord saying, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” [2 CORINTHIANS 12:9]. I don't say it is easy; I do say that if God deigns best, it is necessary for His glory.

Perhaps we pass through a time of testing, and we are wont to pray, “Father, deliver me!” Perhaps we need to again learn with the Master to pray, “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” [MATTHEW 26:39b]. I suggest that we are better served by learning to pray for God's peace. Then, we can apply the instructions given by the Apostle, who said, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” [PHILIPPIANS 4:6]. Then, as God answers, we will learn what follows: “The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” [PHILIPPIANS 4:7].

The Ark of the Covenant had not been resident among the people for seven decades. Religion was enthusiastic and zealous, but it was practised without knowledge. Even David, a man appointed by God to his rule, did not really understand that it is not a matter that God joins us to perform whatever we imagine His will might be. Rather, we see where God is working and we join Him there. He invites us to join Him; we do not decide on a course of action and invite Him to come with us. We call Him Master—He is either Lord of all, or He is not Lord at all.

David was afraid of the Lord precisely because it was dawning on him that he did not really understand the LORD God. However, God was teaching David, and all Israel with him, through emphasising in dramatic fashion that He is holy. David could not take God for granted. Neither may we presume against the Lord God.

¹⁰ See John Woodhouse, **2 Samuel: Your Kingdom Come**, R. Kent Hughes (ed.), **Preaching the Word** (Crossway, Wheaton, IL 2015) 181

2 SAMUEL 6:5-11
COMPLACENCY KILLS!

Like moths circling an open flame, we are drawn inexorably to God's beauty and to His holiness. He draws us and we are fascinated by what we see; but that holiness, unshielded, is dangerous and destructive to the flesh. We cannot look on God's glory except we are shielded from the threat of destruction by the sacrifice of the Saviour. Recall the words of an unknown writer who sought to instruct Jewish Christians scattered in the diaspora. "Let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire" [HEBREWS 12:28, 29]. David, and all Israel, had forgotten the stern warning delivered when God warned, "The LORD your God is a consuming fire" [DEUTERONOMY 4:24]. We forget this truth to our own destruction.

Woodhouse suggests that God's judgement on Uzzah and the aftermath may be the occasion on which David wrote the twenty-fourth Psalm.¹¹

"Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?
And who shall stand in his holy place?
He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not lift up his soul to what is false
and does not swear deceitfully."

[PSALM 24:3, 4]

It is possible that David had been presumptuous in his decision to bring the Ark to Jerusalem. After all, Jerusalem was now called "the City of David" [2 SAMUEL 6:10]. God had not commanded David to bring the Ark to Jerusalem as He had commanded him to attack the Philistines [see 2 SAMUEL 5:19, 23, 24]. David, not God, had decided to bring the Ark to Jerusalem. With the death of Uzzah, any presumption on David's part was jettisoned.

I can imagine a subdued crowd of people walking home. I don't imagine that there were many animated conversations taking place. There was no more laughter, no more singing, no more noisy music, just questions and confusion. People returned to their families, wondering what this could all mean.

Across the road from the threshing floor where Uzzah was killed was a house belonging to a Gittite named Obed-edom. David, in despair, cried out in anguish, "How can the Ark of the LORD come to me?" It was obvious to him that his actions had displeased God in some manner. Thus, we read, "So, David was not willing to take the ark of the LORD into the city of David. But David took it aside to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite." A Gittite would indicate that Obed-edom was a Philistine from the town of Gath [cf. 2 SAMUEL 15:18; 21:19]. Perhaps Obed-edom had come over to David as Ittai the Gittite would do later [see 2 SAMUEL 15:19].

Talk about an unwanted blessing! Obed-edom wasn't jumping up and down, waving his hand and yelling, "Pick me! Pick me!" Like others who had witnessed God's judgement, it is likely that Obed-edom was reluctant to accept the responsibility of keeping the Ark. The king made an executive decision to leave the Ark in the house of Obed-edom. What was the poor man going to say? He didn't dare refuse; this was the king! David spoke, and people obeyed. I can imagine that Mrs. Obed-edom eyed the strange chest setting in her living room. She likely wondered how she would ever clean around it. I can almost hear her say to her husband, "Whatever you do, don't touch it! I can't afford to lose you!" She may have felt like saying, "Let's move onto the roof until we are able to get that thing out of here!" The Ark was a threat, which is why David was unwilling to take the risk of bringing it to Jerusalem.

¹¹ Woodhouse, op. cit., 182

However, a strange thing occurred over the following weeks—the household of Obed-edom was blessed. Perhaps his wife had been barren, and suddenly she was expecting a child. Perhaps his fields yielded a much larger crop than expected. Perhaps there was peace in his family where there had been tension before. The Word is quiet about specifics of the blessing, but it does tell us that “The LORD blessed Obed-edom and all his household” [2 SAMUEL 6:11]. The blessing poured out on this household was so obvious that it could not be hidden. Ultimately, even the king was told, “The LORD has blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, because of the Ark of God” [2 SAMUEL 6:12].

David determined that he would fetch the Ark, bringing it to Jerusalem. Only this time, David would honour God, treating Him as holy. The sons of Kohath would carry the Ark on their shoulders. The king would offer sacrifices every six steps. He would rejoice with all his might before the LORD his God and give all the people gifts. It would take days for the Ark to make the short journey, but they would be days of joy, days of worship.

Obed-edom was recipient of God’s rich blessings; Uzzah was judged by God. Neither of these deserved what happened more than others in Israel. However, in revealing His glory, either God will be honoured or He will break out against that which dishonours Him. The congregation that presumes against the Lord, imagining that it can act as it wishes while ignoring the will of God, is flirting with disaster. The people that presume against God, seeking compromise with wickedness and praising that which is loathsome to the Living God, shall soon be called to account. How awful the warning that says, “We know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay.’ And again, the Lord will judge His people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God” [HEBREWS 10:30, 31].

There is a take-home for each one listening today—*we dare not trifle with God*. David learned, and we must learn, that God is real and He is holy. The Living God is not your warm, fuzzy friend in the sky whom you call when you decide you want something, though you ignore Him the remainder of the time. God is not a gentle grandfatherly sky-god looking down benignly on his creation, though unable to do much about the evil resident in the world. Dale Ralph Davis cogently observes, “We forget that there is heat in [God’s] holiness. No, we do not need to be terrified, but being scared wouldn’t hurt.”¹²

To Christians, I urge you to consider how you treat the One whom you call “Lord.” Outsiders must know that He Who shall judge the living and the dead is holy. Unless your holiness matches His, you shall have no answer to give on that awful day when all the dead, small and great, stand before His great, white throne. What answer can you give if you have refused His grace on that day?

This is the only answer that shall suffice, “If you openly agree with God that Jesus is Master, believing in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be set free. It is through believing in Him that one is made right with the Father and through openly agreeing with the Father that an individual is set free.” When Paul penned that truth, he concluded with this citation of the Prophet Joel, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be set free” [cf. ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13]. Believe this message and be saved; do it now, do it today. Our sincere prayer for you today is your salvation. Amen.

¹² Dale Ralph Davis, **2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity, Focus on the Bible Commentary** (Christian Focus Publications, Great Britain 2002) 77