

The Return of the Ark

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[0 : 00] Well, now we turn to the preaching of God's Word. As I said, we'll be looking at 2 Samuel chapter 6 today, and we'll be reading the chapter in its entirety.

And we see when we read this chapter, it's a focus on the Ark of the Covenant. And it may be a symbol or something that you have heard of before, you understand, and maybe this is the first time you've heard the story, you have very little understanding of this Old Testament passage.

But we hope, regardless of that, that this may be a time of encouragement for you as we understand the true value of the Ark and how it applies to us today. Because I think oftentimes there can be occasion where we don't really understand the significance of something we may have, right?

Maybe you've seen the television show, the Antique Roadshow, before. It's not the most entertaining or stimulating show, but it kind of tracks different antique shows across the nation. It's actually a UK version and a US version. And it's these people that come and bring these items, and they don't really know how valuable they are. They want them to get them appraised. And so we see this dialogue between an appraiser and this person who has this item, whether it's furniture or jewelry or a piece of clothing or a painting of some sort.

[1 : 17] And so I saw one a number of years ago. There's a US version. And there was this older American lady who comes with this small wooden semi-circular table. And she said she got an antique shop for \$25.

And as the man, the appraiser is looking at it, he points out a lot of the details and intricacies of it and turns it over. And there's this original label on the back from when it was made. And he says to her surprise, I think this is probably worth about a quarter of a million dollars, over 10,000 times more than what she paid for it.

And so, of course, she was shocked. It goes on to show her a few weeks later, she actually went to auction to try to sell this table because it was far more valuable to somebody else. And she even knew what it was to herself.

And at auction, it actually sold her \$490,000, nearly a half a million dollars for a little table that she had no idea its worth or her value that has now had provided her with a small fortune.

And so I think that's telling. Again, when we think about the Ark of the Covenant today, we can read a story like this like we will and think, what's the big deal? Why in the world does God have, does he act this way?

[2 : 28] What are we supposed to learn and glean from this story? What's the significance of the story? And I think we learn the significance when we understand the value of the Ark. The value of the Ark not only to the people of Israel in the Old Testament, but the value of the Ark and the symbolism that it shows us today about God's character, about his holiness, about his desire for relationship with us, and how that's meant to influence our lives.

And so let's turn then to our passage, 2 Samuel 6, starting in verse 1. David again brought together all the able young men in Israel, 30,000.

He and all the men went to Baal 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.

They set the Ark of God on a new cart and brought it from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, were guiding the new cart with the Ark of God on it, and Ahio was walking in front of it.

David and all of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the Lord, with castanets, harps, lyres, trembles, sistrums, and cymbals.

[3 : 44] When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the Ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. 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. Then David was angry because the Lord's wrath had broken out against Uzzah, and to this day the place is called Perez-Uzzah.

David was afraid of the Lord that day and said, How can the Ark of the Lord ever come to me? He was not willing to take the Ark of the Lord to be with him in the city of David.

Instead, he took it to the house of Obed-Edom, the Gittite. 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.

Now King David was told, The Lord has blessed the household of Obed-Edom and everything he has because of the Ark of God. So David went to bring up the Ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the city of David with rejoicing.

[4 : 47] When those who were carrying the Ark of the Lord had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf. And wearing a linen ephod, David was dancing before the Lord with all his might, while he and all Israel were bringing up the Ark of the Lord with shouts and the sound of trumpets.

As the Ark of the Lord was entering the city of David, Michael, daughter of Saul, watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, she despised him in her heart.

They brought the Ark of the Lord and set it in its place inside the tent that David had pitched for it. And David sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before the Lord.

And after he had finished sacrificing the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord Almighty. Then he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates, and a cake of raisins to each person and the whole crowd of Israelites, both men and women, and all the people went to their homes.

When David returned home to bless his household, Michael, daughter of Saul, came out to meet him and said, 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.

[6 : 00] David said to Michael, It was before the Lord who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the Lord's people Israel. I will celebrate before the Lord.

I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honor. And Michael, daughter of Saul, had no children to the day of her death.

This is the word of God. Pray with me again. Lord, as we turn to your word, we ask for wisdom and insight that only comes from your spirit.

We pray, Lord, that you allow me to be your empty vessel to communicate your word with effectiveness and truth. May we each be convicted and encouraged through this preaching of your word, and we go forth and give you glory.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. And so as we kind of dive into this passage, trying to think about the significance of the Ark of the Covenant here, I think it's appropriate if we start and give a little background so we have the proper context, especially if you're not familiar with a passage like this.

[7 : 11] If we go back to the beginning of Exodus, we know that the people of Israel have been placed in captivity. For 400 years, they're slaves in Egypt, until God raises up a leader for them, Moses, to deliver them out of Egypt to the promised land that God had promised their forefather, Abraham, long before.

And as they're on this journey to the promised land, the 40 years that they spend in the wilderness, we know that God gives them laws for them to follow in how they live and how they ought to worship.

And included in these laws is instructions for the building of a tabernacle, a place of worship for the Lord. And so within this tabernacle, we read that they're supposed to make this Ark of the Covenant.

This is what we read in Hebrews just a minute ago. And this Ark was a wooden box. It was plated in gold, roughly a meter long, probably about the same size as this lectern here, a little bit less than a meter high and a meter wide, and it was not to be touched by human hands.

It had rings on the side for being carried with poles, poles that were made of acacia wood covered in gold that were to be carried only by the Levites. Inside this box was placed the Ten Commandments.

[8 : 20] On top was something called the Mercy Seat, made of gold, these two cherubim with their arms outstretched. And it was here that God said he would meet with his people. It was here that God's presence would dwell.

And so this is where the high priest would come once a year, sprinkling the blood sacrifice on the Ark to symbolize the wiping away of the sins of the people.

And so while the Ark was meant to be kept here in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle, the people of Israel were often on the move. And so oftentimes this Ark would be in the middle of the people as they moved through the wilderness.

But there was occasion when they were moving into the Promised Land that the Ark was at the front of this procession. We may remember that when they finally entered the Promised Land, when they crossed the Jordan River, it was the Ark and the priest carrying the Ark that went first.

And as they stepped into the Jordan, it turned into dry land and they entered the land of Canaan.

Also, it was the Ark that led the people of Israel around the city walls of Jericho. And the walls came tumbling down.

[9 : 23] Well, as we move forward in the story of the history of Israel, we know that they settled in the Promised Land, but the fighting didn't cease. Oftentimes they were fighting their enemies, and on one occasion they were fighting, battling the Philistines, and they were losing.

And so the elders come together and say, hey, wouldn't it be a good idea if we bring the Ark from the Holy of Holies and bring it with us in battle that we can overpower our enemies? Now, this wasn't anything that God had instructed them to do.

This was of their own ideation. They think they're treating the Ark more like a good luck charm than anything else. And as a result, Israel's defeated.

And the Ark is captured by the Philistines who take it with them back to their land. And so we can't go into all these details this morning, but if we were to continue in 1 Samuel chapter 5, we'd see what happened to the Philistines when they take this Ark to their land.

They experience in the cursing and punishment of God. The people of the Philistines start growing these tumors, and they realize God is judging them for having this Ark. We need to send it back.

And so they put it on this cart carried by these two cows and point it in the direction of Israel.

[10 : 30] And the people of Israel, they reclaim this Ark just across the border of Israel, but it's kept on the border of Israel in this little town basically for storage for the next 20 years.

And so for the entire reign of King Saul, it's not used for worship. It's not kept in the tabernacle. It remains unmoved and unused in the periphery of the land of Israel. And so that brings us to our passage today when King David wants to go and get this Ark and bring it to the new capital, to the city of David, to Jerusalem.

And so what I want us to consider in our passage today is three things that this passage points out to us, three Ps that we see in this passage. First is the passion for the Ark. Secondly, the problem with the Ark.

And thirdly, the promise of the Ark. The passion for the Ark, the problem with the Ark, and the promise of the Ark. So let's consider first the passion of the Ark. We see in 2 Samuel 5 that David is made king.

Saul has been killed. David has already been anointed as the next king, and he is made king. And when the Philistines hear about this, they want to stop this right from the get-go. They've probably heard of David. They've battled David before.

[11 : 43] They know he's a mighty warrior, so they want to make sure he's dethroned so they can continue ruling over Israel. But we know that God delivers the Philistines into the hands of Israel, and the Philistines are defeated.

And after this victory, the first thing that David wants to do is to bring this Ark to Jerusalem. And it's noteworthy to recognize his desire here, because it very well could have been David knew he was going to be king for a while.

He recognized that Saul wasn't a good king, and now he's finally made king. He has secured his first victory. He's the one who's the good leader. He's the one that can protect Israel. Rather than worrying about the Ark of the Covenant, he could have been worrying about having a parade for himself to return to his own capital.

But instead, we see that he does something very different here. Instead, he desires the presence of God. He assembles 30,000 men from every corner of the kingdom, commanders, soldiers, priests, farmers, to form this procession to retrieve the Ark of the Covenant and bring it back to Jerusalem. Because he recognizes here that even though he is the king, the people of Israel need to recognize he is only an earthly king. He is not the true king. It is Israel who needs a true king.

[12 : 59] For his kingship to succeed is wholly dependent on the presence of the almighty king. And so this stands in a stark contrast from King Saul, who didn't care about the presence of God, who only worried about his own glory.

But what we see here is the Ark actually represents the throne of God. And for the past 20 years, it's basically been in storage. David wants to return this Ark that it may be the center of worship, that the people of God may understand that God desires to dwell among them.

And so we see this actually in, again, this Old Testament law. Because in Numbers 2, God gives instructions for where this Ark is to be kept.

And even how the people are to camp around the tabernacle. The tabernacle was to be set up in the middle of the nation of Israel with three tribes on every side. And in the middle of this tabernacle was the Holy of Holies.

And in the middle of this Holy of Holies was the Ark of the Covenant. It meant to symbolize the centrality of God among his people. This is what David wanted to return to.

[14 : 10] I'm going to ask why. Why does David have this urge? Well, this is really a desire that goes back to the very beginning of time, to creation. See, even at the fall, when sin entered the world through Adam and Eve, we've had this ongoing struggle.

How do we return to the presence of the Lord? How do we enter into right relationship with Him? How do we live and approach God and His holiness? And it's really the whole Ark of Redemption, the whole Old Testament story that unveils the answer to this question.

It's not about man coming to God. It's not about how we prove ourselves to God that He may be pleased with us. It's about God coming to us. It's about God providing a way of salvation.

So David doesn't view this Ark of the Covenant as a good luck charm, as the people of Israel had done in the past. He's not simply getting the Ark in order to follow this Old Testament law as it was supposed to be kept.

He's understanding the blessing that comes from God being in His presence. And so if we turn to 1 Chronicles 13 through 15, this actually provides a parallel passage to what we read here in 2 Samuel 6.

[15 : 20] And it provides a bit more detail for us. And in those passages, it actually tells us the Psalms that David and the people sang when they brought the Ark to Jerusalem. And it's actually a combination of the two Psalms we sang this morning, Psalm 96 and Psalm 105, where we rejoice at the presence of the Lord.

The presence of the Lord brings us joy because we have a covenant-keeping God. We have a God who performs wondrous works, whose love endures forever. This is why David and his people had this passion for the presence of God.

And so a question for us, do we share this passion for the presence of God? Do we understand our need for Him? And a need not just means that when we come to church on a Sunday morning we want to meet with Him, not just a need for God when things are going wrong in our lives, when our relationship with our spouse is on the rocks, when we're having trouble with our children or having difficulty at work, a true need for the centrality of God in our lives.

Because I think this is what often happens even in the lives of Christians. We have this desire to cultivate this comfortable life for ourselves. We want to have a good job. We want to have a good relationship and a good family.

We want good standing in our society. We want some level of comfort and dignity. And yes, we want God too. We want a relationship with God too, but we view that more as the cherry on top of the Sunday of our lives rather than allowing that relationship with God, the presence of God to be central to our lives.

[16:58] We have to change our way of thinking that we may reorient our entire lives around God and His presence rather than thinking that we can just allow Him to remain on the periphery, to engage Him in the Gospel when it's convenient, when it's comfortable.

No, we need God as a center of our lives for our very spiritual survival. And so that brings us to our second point, then the problem with the ark.

We see David has this passion for the presence of God, but he pursues this passion in the wrong way because we see in verse 5, the ark was brought out of the house of Abinadab. It's placed on this cart in front of this procession heading to Jerusalem.

And the people are singing and there's playing a bag of instruments, but yet this oxen stumbles, the ark starts to slip, and this man named Uzzah reaches out to stabilize the ark.

And what happens? He's immediately struck dead. Can you imagine the change in mood of 30,000 people when this happens?

[18:03] People singing and dancing and rejoicing with instrument and voice to see instantly someone drop dead. what were they left to think?

Why in the world would something like this happen? And this is the part of the story where a lot of people get annoyed because we think, what in the world happened here?

What a nasty, grumpy, vindictive God is this? Why in the world would he allow this to happen?

Because we look at Uzzah and we think he's just trying to protect the ark.

He has the best of intentions. He has a good heart. He was sincere in his concern. Yet God struck him dead. Why in the world would I want to worship a God like this?

See, the problem with his viewpoint is the same problem that Uzzah had and the people of Israel had. It's that they assumed their own innocence. If we go back to the book of Exodus again, when God gave the law to Moses, he gave very specific instructions for how to build the ark, for how to carry the ark, for how to store the ark.

[19:14] The ark had these gold rings, like I said, with these poles that were to be kept in the ark at all time for carrying. It was only to be carried by Levites. It was never to be touched by any other human.

And we read laws like this, many, many, many more laws that we see in the Old Testament, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, more so than just regarding the ark. And we think, why in the world did God give all these laws to the people of Israel?

They seem so tedious and so burdensome. If you were with us a few months ago, we actually walked through very quickly the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20.

And in those few sermons, we looked at the uses of the law. Why did God give us the law? Well, one of those uses that we looked at is the law serves first and foremost as a mirror for us.

Because when God looks at the law, he sees his perfection. When we look at the law, we see the depth of our sin. It shows us how far we have fallen from God's standard.

[20:16] And so while other religions say, follow the law and you can be saved, the God of the Bible says you cannot follow the law and you cannot save yourself. And so this is the problem that Uzzah had.

It was this lack of humility that was likely based on this familiarity that he had with the ark. It said that this ark had been stored for 20 years on his family's property.

He likely would have seen it often. And so maybe he thought that he had some sort of special standing, that he was good enough to be around the ark, that while the enemies of God face the wrath of God, his nearness gave him some sort of special privilege.

And I wonder, is that not how we often view our own relationship with God? God, we come to church on Sundays, we have some level of familiarity with the Bible and with singing psalms and prayers and we think somehow that earns us some sort of credit to God.

But yet so often our heart is cold and we're totally disengaged with the gospel. If you think around the city around us, oftentimes that also comes with a sense of satisfaction, self, while we're willing to judge others.

[21:29] If you think about the fringe going on right now, the tens of thousands of people who are in this city right now, we walk around and we see these signs, some that are inappropriate, I don't even want to look at the sign much less actually go to the show.

And it's easy for us to look at these people and say, yes, God is going to judge these people. Well, I think that we're secure in this little Christian bubble relying on our own morality.

C.S. Lewis in his book *Mere Christianity*, he states that man's greatest vice, the utmost evil of man is our pride.

He calls this the complete anti-God state of mind and from pride pours forth every other sin, he says. And he talks about in this book how pride distorts our relationship, our relationship with man, but also our relationship with God.

And he writes this, in God, you come up against something in which in every respect is immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that and therefore know yourself as nothing by comparison, you do not know God at all.

[22 : 39] See, the reason that we get so offended by a passage like this and how God takes action and judges a man like Uzzah is because we fail to see the message that God is communicating, that our sin is serious.

See, Uzzah's problem was that although he recognized that the ground might defile the ark, he thought that his hand would not. When in actuality, the filth of his sins was far worse than the dust of the earth.

He had no concept for the seriousness of his own sin. He didn't understand that our sin and God's holiness cannot coexist peacefully. And so we see the effects of this attitude, the effects of this way of thinking.

And so I think it's worth actually pointing out some of the language that's used in this passage. If we look again in verse 8, this is how it reads in the NIV. Then David was angry because the Lord's wrath had broken out against Uzzah and to this day the place is called Perez Uzzah.

Now in this one verse there's a Hebrew word that's used three times, *perats*. And it means to break out or to break through. And so listen to this verse if it's read literally here.

[23 : 54] Then David became angry because Yahweh had broken out with an outbreak against Uzzah. And so the place is called Outbreak of Uzzah to this day. And it's interesting because this is the same word that's used to describe how God defeated the Philistines in the prior chapter.

Listen to this. 2 Samuel 5, verse 20 literally reads this. And David came to the Lord of Outbreaking and David struck them down there and he said, Yahweh has broken out against my enemies like an outbreaking of water.

Therefore he called the name of the place Lord of Outbreaking. And so notice the way that God breaks out against David's enemies in chapter 6 is the same way he breaks out against Uzzah.

Or chapter 5 is the same way he breaks out against Uzzah in chapter 6. You see, God's lethal holiness and justice is the same for the pagan as it is for the churchgoer.

And this is hard for us to understand sometimes. But God is not impressed with our church attendance record. He's not impressed or pleased with our casual worship.

[25 : 06] He's not, he does not want to accept our own spiritual standards that when we fool ourselves into thinking that we are good enough or that our sin isn't that bad or that God owes us something. God desires for us to see the seriousness of our sin in light of his holiness.

And that ultimately leads us to our final point. Because while this passage exposes the problem that Israel had with the ark, the story doesn't end here. The people of Israel aren't just left in this hopeless reality of their sin because what we see here is the promise of the ark.

In verse 9 it says that David was afraid of the Lord and instead of continuing on this journey, instead of bringing the ark all the way to Jerusalem, he basically abandons his plans and he leaves the ark in the house of Obed-Eden.

He didn't really, he didn't say that he asked for mission, he just said he left it there. Can you imagine Obed-Eden when he receives this rather unwanted gift? Think about this, he probably would have heard that this caused plagues to the Philistines, this ark and now it's brought to Israel and Uzzah's just died because he touched the ark and David wants to leave the ark with him.

It's like someone handing like a hand grenade without a pin. Of course he doesn't want this gift. But yet in this game of hot potato, you take it, I don't want it, David wins because he's king and what we see here is this illustration of what happens when we do recognize our own sinfulness in light of God's holiness.

[26 : 32] We often want to run and we want to hide. This is what Adam and Eve did in the garden, did they not when sin entered the world? We sense this crushing weight of guilt and helplessness because we don't possess the righteousness that's needed to meet God's standards.

But that's not the response that God wants from us. He doesn't want sin to drive us away from him, he wants us to recognize our sin and run to him. Recognize your sin, I am the only one who can save you.

And we see this is the message of this passage. Obed-Eden isn't destroyed, it's just the opposite. With the ark in his presence, his family experiences blessing. David is told of this and he returns again with this renewed joy to bring the ark back to Jerusalem.

And so when he does it this time, it's very different than how David approaches the first time. He doesn't just come with enthusiasm and passion, he comes with a proper understanding of forgiveness. He comes with a recognition of his own sinfulness in light of God's holiness.

And so rather than bring the ark on a cart, it's carried as it should have been by these poles, by the Levites. And before they even begin their journey, before they even take that seventh step, David offered sacrifice.

[27 : 52] When they arrive in Jerusalem, more sacrifice. And so again, it shows us that David is in keeping with the law of the Lord here. When we think about the tabernacle again as was described in Hebrews, before the high priest could enter in the Holy of Holies where the ark was kept, a sacrifice was to be made at the altar of burnt offering at the entrance to the tabernacle.

And so this symbolizes the payment of blood that must be made in order for us to enter into the presence of God. And so this is what causes David to dance and to leap and to sing with all his might because he recognizes and understands that fellowship with God is possible.

What had been promised to Moses when this law was given holds true. I will meet you at the mercy seat. And if this is true for David, then it's all the more true for you and me because what David could only see dimly, we now see clearly.

To see the value of this ark is to see the foreshadowing that it provides us, pointing us forward to the future reality that we will no longer depend on the blood of animals for the forgiveness of sin. It points us forward to our perfect sacrifice, the Son of God, Jesus, who came to earth, who lived a perfect life, perfectly fulfilling the law, dying the death we deserve, rising in victory over the grave.

[29 : 13] And so it brings us back to what we read in Hebrews chapter 9. Jesus did not enter the tabernacle by means of blood of goats and calves, but he entered the most holy place once and for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.

See, the presence of God does not reside on that mercy seat of the ark any longer. Behind that veil, that curtain that separated the holy of holies.

See, that veil has been torn and we no longer need the ark to experience the presence of the Lord. In fact, this is what was prophesied by Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 3.16, he says, the ark of the covenant of the Lord will not come to mind or be remembered or be missed.

It shall not be made again. At that time, Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the Lord. What is he talking about? He's prophesying where we live now.

We recognize that we don't need the ark. Those who have received God's grace through faith in Christ, we no longer need an ark because we are the ark. God, we are the temple of God.

[30 : 22] It is God who dwells in us. And so in the same way that David could rejoice and celebrate as he did, we can as well.

We see at the end of this passage, we can't spend too much time here, but we see that David is chastised by Michael for his exuberance. And how does he respond? He responds by saying, I will rejoice because the Lord has chosen me.

Can we respond in the same way by saying, the Lord has chosen me? If so, we rejoice in the presence of the Lord.

If this is not you, recognize that Christ's blood has been shed for you. His grace is available to you. He longs to be in your presence. And so may it be our desire to live in the presence of the Lord that he may be central to our life, that our sins have been forgiven and we rejoice in perfect relationship with him.

Let's pray together. Lord, we thank you for the symbolism we see in the Ark of the Covenant. Let's pray together.