

## The Terror of God

2 Samuel 6:1-23

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Now turn with me if you would to 2 Samuel chapter 6, and before we read this passage let's ask for God's blessing.

*Father, we thank You for the scriptures. We ask now for the blessing of Your Spirit that we might not just read it, but understand it and apply it. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. And David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baale-judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the Lord of hosts who sits enthroned on the cherubim. And they carried the ark of God on a new cart and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. And Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart, with the ark of God, and Ahio went before the ark.

And David and all the house of Israel were making merry 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 burst forth 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.

And it was told King David, "The Lord has blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, because of the ark of God." So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing. And when those who bore the ark of the Lord had gone six steps, he sacrificed an ox and a fattened animal. And David danced before the Lord with all his might. And David was wearing a linen

ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the horn.

As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal the daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, and she despised him in her heart. And they brought in the ark of the Lord and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it. And David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. And when David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts and distributed among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins to each one. Then all the people departed, each to his house.

And David returned to bless his household. But Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David and said, "How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' female servants, as one of the vulgar fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!" and David said to Michal, "It was before the Lord, who chose me above your father and above all his house, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the Lord—and I will make merry before the Lord. I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in your eyes. But by the female servants of whom you have spoken, by them, I shall be held in honor." And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.

May God bless that Word to us.

It's a gold box 3¼ feet by 2¼ by 2¼. It's about the size of the chest that some of you have at the bottom of your bed that contains your grandmother's linen and blankets and who knows what. It's a box. It's a box covered in gold made of acacia wood and on the top of it on either side are two cherubim with outstretched wings. Inside the box were purportedly the tablets of stone on which the Ten Commandments had been written, God's covenant Word to Israel, a golden pot of manna, and Aaron's rod, that budded. It's the Ark, the Ark of God, the Ark of the Covenant of God. It was a symbol of God's presence. In the tabernacle above this ark was the presence, the shekinah, the shining glory of God, but this Ark had been taken. It had been captured. Saul had taken it into battle against the Philistines. It had been captured in the battle of Aphek. It was too hot for the Philistines to handle. You remember seventy Philistines were killed.

So it had gone aside to this man, Abinadab and his two sons, in a place called, well, here it's called Baale-judah, but it's also called Kiriath-Jearim. Thirty thousand men—that's a lot. Thirty thousand men ascend to this place, Kiriath-Jearim, well, Baale-judah, nine — ten miles west north-west of Jerusalem. Like

Canton from here—that ten miles, roughly?

Let's go to three places tonight. Let's go to this place; the home of Abinadab and his two sons. Let's go there first of all because in this place, unless it journeys to another house, we learn something. We learn that the presence of God can sometimes be a very dangerous thing. The place is rockin'. They've put this box, this gold box, they've put it on a new cart with two oxen and they're trundling along a lane of some description. They've come to what seems to be the very outer precincts of Jerusalem. It's hilly. One of the oxen stumbles and all of a sudden there's been all this singing and trumpets and castanets and all kinds of instruments. The place is rocking and it all goes quiet and Uzzah, one of the sons of Abinadab is dead. He's on the floor beside the box. There was an inquiry. "What happened? What in the world happened?"

"One of the oxen stumbled and Uzzah put out his hand and took hold of the box and God struck him dead."

When I was in seminary (not RTS, now) before I came to RTS I was in a liberal Presbyterian seminary. I was told this story was an example of popular religion among semi-nomadic pre-scientific people and it was utterly incompatible with the New Testament. Except I remember putting up my hand and saying, "What about Acts chapter 5 and Ananias and Sapphira? This is New Testament. It's within living memory of Pentecost. This is the early church and God struck them dead."

And David — see there in verse 8 — David is angry. He's angry! Are you? I mean, let's be honest for a minute. What is this? I mean, would God prefer this box to fall on the floor and the contents spill out on the ground, on the mud? Is that what God would want? This isn't murder. It's not adultery. It's not blasphemy. He put out his hand to stop the ark from falling to the ground. That's all he did! And David is angry. He's angry with God. How can God do such a thing? Is God petulant, irascible? Is there a dark side to God; is God given to fitful rages and outbursts? What is this?

Everything about what David had done was wrong. Everything about it was wrong.

God had given very specific instructions about this box. This box represented Him. It was the Ark of the Covenant of God. It was the Ark of God. How does the author of Samuel describe it? "Which is called by the name of the Lord of Hosts who sits enthroned on the cherubim."

This box represented the very presence of God in their midst.

It was not to be carried on a cart even if it was new. No one was allowed to touch it. No one was allowed to touch it! And the only people who could carry it on

poles were a special select group of Levites known as the Kohathites. They will be the ones who will carry it into Jerusalem. Everything about this was wrong.

But, OK, it was wrong, but is it right that Uzzah should be struck dead for preventing this Ark from falling to the ground? Be very careful how you answer that question. Be very, very careful.

Jonathan Edwards has a sermon, as you might imagine, on this passage. He says Uzzah was guilty of arrogance, that he thought it would be worse for the box to touch the mud and clay of the ground rather than a sinner's hand. Which would be preferable — for the box to fall to the ground and touch the mud or for a sinner's hand to touch that which represented the very presence of God?

God, my friends, is holy. It's what made Nadab and Abihu had learned in Leviticus 10 when they offered strange fire to the Lord and God consumed them. God is holy. God is not to be trifled with.

Do you know what it cost to save you so that you can go into the presence of Jesus; so that you can go into the presence of Jesus and say, "My friend, my friend, my sweet friend." What we were thinking about this morning: the holiness, the holiness, the righteousness of God had to be reckoned with; the holiness of God had to come down upon His Son on Calvary so that we can go into the presence of our Father and call him Father, call him Abba Father. God is holy and the presence of God can be a dangerous thing. If you're not covered by the blood of Jesus the holiness of God is a terrible thing.

That's what my dear friend was trying to tell the children tonight with *The Shorter Catechism* question, "What is hell?" I'm glad he was trying to do it and not me — it is endless, terrible and endless punishment. We believe that! We believe that because Jesus taught that. Jesus taught that! If you think that you can do as you please and come at the end of the day into the presence of God, my dear, dear friends, you need to think again because unless you're covered by the blood of Jesus, there is only wrath. There is only hell — endless, terrible punishment.

David is angry in verse 8. In verse 9 he's afraid. He's afraid. "How can the Ark of the Lord come to me," he says. So he sends it aside into the house of a man called Obed-edom the Gittite and it's there for three months — three months contemplating the holiness of God.

Now you're going to think about it just for about twenty minutes and for some of you as soon as you leave these walls and drive home, you're going to forget about it, but these people had to think about the holiness of God for three months.

Let's go to the streets of Jerusalem because after three months David hears that the house of Obed-edom the Gittite has been blessed. And that for me and for

some commentators, though not all, but for some commentators that may imply that the motives as to why David wanted the Ark in Jerusalem in the first place may well have been a little shady. Perhaps the reason he wanted the Ark in Jerusalem in the very first place was not in itself a pure reason.

So, they do it the right way now. Kohathites, poles, as deathly silence, not a breath can be heard and they lift this Ark and they look round. Everybody's still standing. They take one step, two steps, three, four, five, six. Everybody breathes a sigh of relief and David orders a sacrifice, a bull is sacrificed. It's brought all the way in to Jerusalem to a tent that David has erected. God is coming into Jerusalem and there's exuberance, there's joy, joy at the mercy of God. There's dancing. David dances before the Lord in extravagant fashion.

Now, please, this is not the text to say there should be dancing in public worship. Not unless you want to be semi-naked as David was. There were no choreographers in the temple. There were musicians and conductors and instruments and choirs, but there were no choreographers in the temple. There's absolutely no evidence that there was dancing in the temple or in the synagogue or in the early church. This is a unique moment in the history of redemption and David is filled with joy. The presence of God can sometimes be a joyful thing, a joyful thing. "Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

But let's go after David has celebrated and everyone's been given this present. It must have been wonderful for whoever it was who was doing all that baking – there's a phenomenal amount of food that's being distributed. It's a day of celebration. It's thanksgiving and thanksgiving and thanksgiving and thanksgiving and David now goes home.

And you know, there's a lesson here, too, because there can be joy and glory and wonder outside, in church, at work, respect and honor and applause and then you go home and you're just the unfaithful husband.

Things are not good in David's home. Michal, who had looked out of the window and seen David dancing, cavorting, showing himself, according to Michal. We don't know where this ephod or what kind of ephod this was, whether David now has assumed the office of a Melchizedekian priest, perhaps. Had David exposed himself? That's the accusation Michal is saying. He had exposed himself in the course of this dancing to the female servants and she is miffed! She is royally miffed.

Now, I sympathize with Michal. I'm sorry. I have some sympathy for Michal. She'd been a pawn in David's political aggrandizement when Abner had come south because he was miffed because Ish-bosheth had accused him of sleeping with one of the women. David had said, "I want Michal back," who was by this time married again. The poor husband, do you remember, following her all the way and weeping and lamenting.

There is no chemistry in this marriage between David and Michal. She may be living in his house, but so are ten or twelve or maybe twenty other women; at least a dozen wives and concubines that we've read of in chapters 3 and 5. Things are not good in David's house. Is Michal exaggerating in the charges that she makes about David's dancing, exposing himself? Perhaps and perhaps not.

Did you make any observation or judgment as you read this exchange between Michal and David? It was pretty hostile. It was pretty snippy and I would give equal marks to both sides. David gave as much as he got. He was as surly to her as she was to him.

Now verse 23 says, "And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death." Many commentators, I have to tell you, many commentators read that and they say, "That's God's judgment. She was wrong to criticize David and God judged her."

I'm sorry, the text doesn't say that. The text does not say that. All that it says is that she didn't have children. She didn't have children because, how can I put it delicately? There were no conjugal relations between David and Michal. After this snippy exchange Michal may well have lived in the house, but there was no rapport. She had no children. So before you exonerate David completely and condemn Michal completely, I don't think the text will let you do that. David's motives were mixed. It's saying something. It's saying something that you may well understand, some of you. You go to work and you're loved and adored and treasured and secretaries say all manner of wonderful things to you and about you because you pay them to do that. [Laughter] And you go home and it's "Why haven't you put out the trash?" Now it's on a bigger scale here, but things are not good in David's home.

David may well be a king and he may well have assumed a Melchizedekian priestly role now and he may well be a type of Jesus, but David is a sinner still and not my savior. "How sweet the name of David sounds in a believer's ear. It calms my sorrows and heals my wounds and drives away my fear." No, no, no, no, no, no. "How sweet the name of Jesus," great David's greater son.

The presence of God has come into Jerusalem. Next time, something absolutely wonderful is going to happen because God is going to speak His Word. He's going to make a covenant. He's going to make a promise. He's going to reaffirm everything that He has said to Abraham and Moses; that a Messiah is coming, a Savior is coming, but all you have to do is take a little look into David's home and you'll see that Messiah is not David, great as he was.

Let's pray together.

*Father, we thank You for Your Word and thank you for David with all his sins and foibles and short-comings. We tremble for Michal for the text says again and again she was the daughter of Saul. That very description perhaps telling us there was no faith in her heart, that ultimately that perhaps she was indeed an unbeliever.*

*Lord, we pray tonight as we think about these things that we might more and more and more have this profound sense of gratitude that You have sent a true Savior, a wonderful Savior, even Jesus our Lord.*

*Receive our thanks and grant Your blessing. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Please stand. Receive the Lord's benediction.

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

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