

**2 Samuel 6:1-23**

**SI:** All the stories in the Bible show us our need for salvation and God’s provision of salvation through Christ. So look for those things as we read.

**INTRO:** I’m going to read a summary of a movie and you try to name the movie. An epic tale in which an intrepid archaeologist tries to beat a band of Nazis to a unique religious relic which is central to their plans for world domination. Battling against a snake phobia and a vengeful ex-girlfriend, Indiana Jones is in constant peril, making hair's-breadth escapes at every turn in this celebration of the innocent adventure movies of an earlier era.

Of course, you probably guessed it before I started reading:

*Raiders of the Lost Ark.*

It seems like putting together Nazis and snakes and a guy with a whip and the ark of the covenant would be such a strange mixture that it couldn’t work.

But it did work. A great movie, great plot, great characters, very entertaining.

2 Samuel 6 is also an ark story, but it’s harder to understand than the movie, especially the part about Uzzah touching the ark and being struck dead.

But I want to argue that as strange as this story sounds to us, it is actually a presentation of the Gospel.

This story is the good news of God’s salvation in Jesus Christ.

One of the first things David wanted to do when he became king over all Israel in Jerusalem was bring the Ark of the Covenant to the city.

The ark was a wooden box overlaid with gold within and without.

It had a lid with two angels, two cherubim. Lid called the mercy seat.

It signified the throne of God himself and his presence on earth.

As verse 2 says, the LORD Almighty who is enthroned between the cherubim.

The ark had been made during Moses’ time following instructions the Lord had given from Mt. Sinai. The ark was to be kept at all times in the back room of the tabernacle, out of sight. That room called the Holy of Holies.

When the Israelites first came into Promised Land God told the Levites who were carrying the ark to go ahead, step into the Jordan River.

When they did, the river parted and people went over. Re-enactment of Red Sea.

And then, at the very first battle, Jericho. God told Levites to march around the city with the ark, when people shouted, wall fell and city was taken.

These were ways the Lord said: I’m your king. I’m with you.

During the time of the chief priest Eli, his sons thought the ark was a lucky charm.

Without asking God, they took the ark with them into a battle.

They treated it like they had God in a box.

So instead of winning, God allowed them to lose. 30,000 Israelites were killed, Eli's sons were killed, and the ark was captured.

The Philistines took the ark as a trophy, but wherever they took it, it brought terrible destruction. So the Philistines couldn't get rid of it fast enough.

They sent it back to Israel to a town just over the border. There it stayed 50 years.

It was there all during the reign of King Saul, which is an indication of how little the ark meant to him and his ambivalent relationship with God.

So David's desire to bring the ark to Jerusalem was to put God's worship into the center of national life and into the center of David's life. Personal for him.

Notice he says at one point: How can the ark of the Lord come to me?

So that's what he wants to do. And he sets out to do it his way.

But two things happened, two strange things.

And these completely changed David's approach to the ark, so much so, that when he finally brings the ark to Jerusalem, he's a changed man.

The first strange thing is that Uzzah is struck dead when he touches the ark.

This incident gets the most attention when people read this chapter.

Sometimes that's the only thing that's focused on.

And that tends then to overshadow the second strange thing that happens.

The ark is left at the home of a man named Obed-Edom, a Gittite, and he and all his household is blessed. What's a Gittite? On that hangs a tale! We'll get to it.

So let's look at this story under three headings.

First, How David was changed. We'll apply to selves, how we should be changed.

And then the two reasons why. Two things necessary for change.

Before I go any farther, credit where credit is due. Sermon by Tim Keller.

## **MP#1 How David was changed and how God wants you to be changed**

Let's start at the end of the story.

Verse 16: David comes into Jerusalem with the ark, leaping and dancing.

He's not wearing kingly garments, he's wearing a plain linen ephod, which was a sleeveless shirt or tunic worn by people assisting in worship.

He directs the ark into the tent of worship he has set up.

He offers sacrifices, burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before the Lord.

Fellowship offerings were for feasts, because part of the meat was eaten.

David also gives other food items to everyone there. So it's a grand feast.

And it wasn't just for the nobles and officials, it was for everybody.

Both men and women. That's important. All the people. That's important.

King David is mixing it up with everyone.

Singing, dancing, eating, celebrating this occasion of the Lord's presence with men and women, rich and poor, dignitaries and commoners, servants and masters

And at the end of the day he blesses them all and sends them home.

When Michal, daughter of Saul, saw David leaping and dancing with the crowd she despised him in her heart. Why? She had been raised as a king's daughter.

She understood how power worked. She understood how kingship operated.

So when David came home she went out to meet him.

She didn't speak to him in private. She wanted other people to hear.

What sarcasm and sneering:

How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!

The way David worshipped the Lord with such emotional freedom, the way he danced and feasted with everyone high and low alike disgusted her.

In the shame and honor culture of the Ancient Near East, kings were expected to be remote and distant, they were to rule by fear and intimidation, never stooping to their subjects, never identifying with them, always lording over them.

Kings were supposed to use their dignity and splendor as an instrument of power.

If anyone was too familiar with the king he would be killed.

That was the model of kingship David probably would have followed.

He would have picked it up as the way kings were expected to be.

But something changed him—

It changed his view of himself and his dignity and power and other people.

Michal saw this change and she hated it.

She was trying with her sarcasm and public rebuke to shake him out of it.

David's answer to her is wonderfully theological.

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—

This is not a proud statement. He's saying: I was chosen by grace.

I was the eighth son. I was a shepherd. I didn't have royal blood. I didn't earn it. God just chose me. He elected me. I'm simply the recipient of his grace.

How can I not celebrate that?

Then he says:

I will celebrate before the LORD. I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes.

He's saying, even if I'm the king of Israel and nobody is above me in Israel, I can't stand on my own dignity before God. God is above me.

So I can dance. I can open my heart before someone greater than me.

He says, and I'm going to keep doing it. I'm going to be humiliated in own eyes

But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honor.

He's saying, they understand. They worship the same Lord I do.

And they respect me more for being a king under God, humble before him, than they would if I was the kind of king the other nations have.

The narrator says: Michal daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death.

Doesn't say God struck her or David stayed away. We don't know.

It's good storytelling. Pointing out she remained alienated from David and God.

What she could not understand was why David had become a changed man.

The thing that changed him was worship. Worship changes you.

What you worship changes you

Novelist David Foster Wallace was not a Christian but made profound observation.

In the day-to day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships . . . If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never . . . feel you have enough.

Worship your body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly. And when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally grieve you. Worship power, and you will end up feeling weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to numb you to your own fear. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart, you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out . . . the insidious thing about these forms of worship . . . is that they're unconscious. They are (our) default settings.

David had certainly worshipped the Lord before, but his worship was renewed.

He had a fresh experience of God that make him humble and open hearted and happy and glad to celebrate with his fellow Israelites, even the servants.

This is what God wants for you. Not to worship money, body, power, intellect.

But to worship him. So you become a humble, joyful person.

So what was it that renewed David's worship of God?

It was these two incidents surrounding the ark.

What's crucial is that you see both of them go together.

If you just focus on one you'll have an incomplete view and won't be changed.

## **MP#2 The first incident that renewed David's worship was Uzzah's death**

Uzzah and Ahio were young men leading the ox cart that was hauling the ark.

The oxen stumbled and Uzzah was afraid the ark was about to fall, so he reached out his hand and touched the ark to steady it and the LORD's anger burned against Uzzah and God struck him down beside the ark.

We read that and think: That was a little excessive!

One minute you have the leaders of youth group at the center of all this celebration, and the next minute one of them is dead.

God not only killed Uzzah, he killed the parade.

You can imagine those standing closest being shocked, maybe screaming, and all the singing and music stops, people start getting hysterical, backing away.

The atheist Richard Dawkins said the god of the Bible is a terrible person, moody, capricious, vengeful. I imagine Dawkins would say that about this story.

God killed a sincere person just for breaking a rule? What a terrible god.

What's interesting is that you can find some Christian commentaries and sermons that respond to those sorts of criticisms by basically doubling down.

Yes, that's right, what this is about. Sincerity it not enough. If you don't follow all God's rules he's going to judge you. That's how God is, so deal with it.

Is that really what this is about? Keeping the rules? Yes. But not really.

When you read Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy there are all these rules about the worship of God and approaching God. These rules start in everyday life, rules about what you eat, wear, touch, wash—rules about ritual cleanness.

Then there are rules about worship itself, sacrifices, and so forth, and all these rules culminate on the ark itself and the treatment of the holiest object.

All manmade religions have rituals and rules that worshippers must perform to appease their deity. But that's not what God's rules for Israel were about.

In Deuteronomy 4, when Moses is about to die, he has carefully reviewed all the rules and laws and he says to Israel if you keep them . . .

He doesn't say, God will be appeased. He says the nations around you will see what a great God the LORD is, and how he is unlike the gods of the nations.

In other words, Moses is saying, the ultimate purpose of all the rules and laws is to be a sermon, about who the true God is, and how he must be approached, and

how he's going to save the world.

These rules were concrete object lessons, concrete Gospel presentations. So if the rules were forgotten, disobeyed, or treated lightly then what was at stake was that the message of God to the world would be lost.

The true and only way of salvation would be lost.

That was what was at stake. Not just a rule being broken, but the faith of Israel becoming no different from the religions of the surrounding nations, and the God of Israel being viewed as no different from the other gods.

So what were the particular rules about the ark? I'll tell you, but first, there is one detail about the ark you need to know for these rules to make sense. The ark itself was a repository for the Ten Commandments. Held two stone tablets. Ten Commandments are the expression of God's holy will and character. They are the obedience God the Creator requires of every human being. So the ark was the focused presence on earth of God holiness and God's moral law.

The rules for moving the ark were that it was to be covered so couldn't be seen. There were metal rings on the corners for two poles to go through and four Levites were to carry the ark on their shoulders, not putting it down, not putting it on a cart, not touching it, until they had transported it to the Holy of Holies. All this was to communicate: If you come into contact with God's law you will die. This is not the way any other religions treat their holy objects.

Worshippers gaze on them, touch, rub, to show devotion and for power to rub off. Because in every other religion, the way you get your salvation is through your efforts, though obeying the rituals, through appeasing the deity.

But only biblical religion says no, there's a chasm between you and God, because his moral law condemns you. You touch his holiness and you die.

Because no one righteous, not even one.

There is an infinite chasm between you and God because of your sin and your efforts will never traverse it. If there's going to be any salvation, not from you. It will have to be from God. It will have to be a gracious intervention.

Did you notice, as I listed the rules for moving the ark, that all were broken?

It wasn't covered, it wasn't carried by Levites, it was put on a cart.

They all deserved to be struck down, David especially because he was in charge.

God wasn't moody and vengeful. He was deliberate and restrained.

He killed Uzzah because Uzzah's act communicated falsehoods that if allowed to go unchallenged, would have corrupted God's revealed truth to Israel.

Uzzah thought that if the ark hit the ground, it would be more dishonored

by the dirt than it would by being touched by his own sinful hand.  
That's terrible theology, that things are bad, things are the problem, not us.  
That's a complete departure from the biblical view.  
When that gets into the church it kills biblical faith.

And also, by touching the ark and keeping it stable, he was giving God a hand.  
He was helping God out. That's how all other religions view their gods.  
The gods needs us, need our offerings, our rituals.  
There's this partnership between men and gods to give each other what's needed.  
That's also terrible theology.  
The LORD God Almighty, maker of heaven and earth owns all things,  
he is fully satisfied in himself and needs nothing from us.

Do you see how much was on the line when Uzzah touched the ark?  
If Uzzah got away with this, and if David the king was there nodding his approval,  
and if God's worship in Jerusalem had been established with this way of  
thinking—then the doctrines of our sin and God's holiness would have been lost.  
And that means the message of grace would have been lost as well.  
And the promises of a Savior would have been lost.  
Because in it's place would have been a religion of man's efforts.

So God sent a message to David and to Israel and to us who are reading this.  
I am holy and your sins separate you from me. If you touch me, you die.  
David realized that. That's why, after the shock had passed, he said:  
How can the ark of God come to me? That's the first step to renewing worship.

**MP#3 The second incident that renewed David's worship was O-E's blessing.**  
The Uzzah incident showed David he was more sinful than he wanted to believe.  
The incident with Obed-Edom showed David that God wanted his fellowship,  
and that it was possible for sin to be dealt with,  
and that David was more loved by God than he could imagine.  
I said a minute ago that when people study this chapter, Uzzah's death gets so much  
attention that this other incident is passed over. But it's just as important.

Picture the scene. Uzzah was struck dead.  
This self-righteous and self-congratulatory parade is killed.  
It says that David was afraid. If he was afraid, can imagine others were terrified.  
They were recoiling in fear from the ark and from these sense of God's holiness.  
So what do we do with the ark? We can't just leave in the road.  
Nearby was the house of a man, Obed-Edom. He was a Gittite.

What's a Gittite? If you do a quick Bible search you'll find that a Gittite was someone from the Philistine city of Gath. Goliath was a Gittite.  
Remember incident happens close to the border of Philistia and Israel.  
Obed-Edom was a Philistine living in Israel. A foreigner. Traditional enemies.

The people are looking at the ark like it's radioactive waste—

We can't leave it in the road. No Israelite will take it.

Let's dump this toxic object in the foreigner's home and get out of here.

Fifty years earlier when the Philistines had captured the ark and put it in the temple of their gods, the Lord struck them with death and disease. They sent it from one Philistine city to another, and everywhere the ark went, the same thing.

Finally, in a panic, they sent it back to Israel.

Everybody knew that history. So they were sure Obed-Edom would be cursed.

But what happens? For the three months it was there, the Lord blessed household.

Prosperity, happiness, fertility.

And David was told about it: The LORD has blessed the household of Obed-Edom and everything he has, because of the ark of God.

God was sending David a message.

He sent him a message through Uzzah which David heard loud and clear.

But now the Lord sends David another message.

Yes, I'm a holy God who punishes sin, and I'm a gracious God who loves to bless.

And by blessing a Philistine, God was also saying—anybody can be saved.

So don't think the good people are saved and the bad people aren't.

Or the insiders are saved but the outsiders aren't.

Nobody deserves it. It's all my sovereign grace. Biblical religion great leveler.

So David is encouraged once again to bring the ark to Jerusalem.

But this time he reads God's law about the treatment of the ark.

This time he acknowledges all these rules that declare God's holiness.

And here's the detail that is emphasized:

When those who were carrying the ark of the LORD had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf.

So before they took the seventh step into the holy place, there was sacrifice. Blood.

When the High Priest would go into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement

he would take the blood of sacrifices and he would sprinkle it on the gold lid of the ark. Called the mercy seat and atonement cover.

Significance was that the blood shielded the High Priest and shielded Israel from the condemnation of the law so they wouldn't be struck dead.

Someone else had died. And God would then speak to priest over the mercy seat. That's a vivid depiction of the Gospel.

You can't approach a holy God in your self.

But if there's a sacrifice for sin, then grace will open the way and justify you.

David didn't know the how the blood of sacrifices atoned for sin.

But he had learned again that God is both holy and gracious.

And when he put those two things together, it changed him.

I am more sinful and more lost than I ever thought, but the fact that God still wants to have fellowship with me and bless me means his grace is greater.

That made David dance. That made him worship. And it changed his life.

David only had a shadows and hints of Jesus Christ. We know him fully.

Hebrews says: Because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins, therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased . . . Here I am, it is written about me in the scroll, I have come to do your will, O God." . . . And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

When Jesus died, the veil in the temple was ripped and the Holy of Holies was opened and the ark became obsolete.

Because Jesus was the sacrifice to end all sacrifices.

When you say, Father, accept me because of what Jesus did, you go in.

And the ark of the covenant has been fulfilled in Jesus.

If you're like Uzzah, thinking you can manage God, help God out, contribute to your own salvation. You're not going to have the freedom of sonship.

You're not going to dance before the Lord.

An old hymn says:

To see the Law by Christ fulfilled, and hear his pardoning voice,

Changes a slave into a child and duty into choice.

That's what changed David—and he only saw a shadow and hint of Christ.

We know him. We know his cross. How much more should we be changed.