

Desiring a Dangerous God

King David Pt.1

2 Samuel 6:1-12 8-2-2009

Summary: David wanted the ark because he desired the presence of God. His joy rubbed off on everyone as they celebrated, but then God struck Uzzah dead for touching the ark (irreverence = the greatest sin). David was angry because he thought God did something wrong, and that anger turned into the bad kind of fear (the kind that drives you away from God instead of drawing you near Him). The fear replaced the desire and David dumped the Ark at Obed-Edom's house. The solution to that is to see the goodness of God, which David saw when God blessed Obed-Edom's house. When David saw that his desire returned, but this time with the good kind of fear.

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1 David again brought together out of Israel chosen men, thirty thousand in all. 2 He and all his men set out from Baalah of 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 that are on the Ark. 3 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 4 with the Ark of God on it, and Ahio was walking in front of it. 5 David and the whole house of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the LORD, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, sistrums and cymbals. 6 When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the Ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. 7 The LORD's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the Ark of God. 8 Then David was angry because the LORD's wrath had broken out against Uzzah, and to this day that place is called Perez Uzzah. 9 David was afraid of the LORD that day and said, "How can the Ark of the LORD ever come to me?" 10 He was not willing to take the Ark of the LORD to be with him in the City of David. Instead, he took it aside to the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. 11 The Ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite for three months, and the LORD blessed him and his entire household. 12 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 down and brought up the Ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with rejoicing.

Introduction

This has got to be the ultimate example of raining on someone's parade. The people are the happiest they have ever been – singing and dancing with all their might. And they are not celebrating a touchdown or home run or some earthly thing. They are celebrating before the Lord in worship – rejoicing over the presence of God. What could be better? You might think that now that the people have turned back to God and His way, and are worshipping Him with such genuine hearts that they have exuberant joy in Him, you might think God would do everything possible to avoid spoiling this in any way. Like a mother who spends two hours trying to

get a colicky baby to sleep, and finally succeeds – at that point the mother will do anything to avoid waking the child up. Israel is finally doing what she should be doing – rejoicing in God. And the godly might be looking around at that and saying, “Don’t do anything to rock the boat.”

And then, right in the middle of the whole celebration, God kills Uzzah. The ox stumbles, the Ark is about to take a tumble, Uzzah reaches out to steady it and is instantly struck dead. He just did not want it to fall down in the dirt – what is so bad about that? What kind of harshness is this – that God would strike a man dead who was in the middle of worshipping Him and joyfully serving Him? We are going to learn from this chapter some of the most important principles about worship and about the nature of God that we will ever learn. And the whole chapter focuses on emotions. I think if we go through the emotions described in this chapter one by one we will get what this section of God’s Holy Word is teaching.

But before we jump in to verse 1 let me just say a couple things about emotions. There is a well known book written by James Dobson titled, Emotions, can you trust them? And I think most Christians, when they hear that question, would answer, no – you cannot trust your emotions at all. And in one sense that is true. You cannot trust your emotions to show you right and wrong – that’s for sure. Sometimes something can feel so good and so right, and yet it is deadly and evil. Sometimes something can feel so loving, and yet Scripture says it is unloving. If you use your emotions to discern right and wrong you will get into all kinds of error.

So you cannot trust your emotions to show you right and wrong. However there is another sense in which you can trust your emotions. Your emotions are a perfectly accurate indicator of what is in your heart. Your emotions are important for several reasons, and one of them is they always tell the truth about what is in your heart. If someone gets hurt and you do not feel any compassion – then you do not have any compassion. If you do feel compassion, then you do have compassion. If you do not feel any desire to come to church, then you do not have any desire to come to church. Your emotions always tell the truth about what is in your heart.

And that is of immense value in assessing your spiritual condition. Very often Christians will fall into thinking that as long as they are resolved to do the right thing, that is all that matters. They figure, If I don’t have any desire to pray or commune with God, that is OK as long as I force myself to do it anyway. That is not true at all. Scripture is filled with warnings about the evil of serving God with a grudging attitude. God loves a cheerful giver. He rebukes the priests in Malachi 1 who serve Him while saying, “What a burden.”

Deuteronomy 28:47 Because you did not serve the LORD your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity, 48 ... He will put an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you.

Resolve and commitment are not enough. There must be joy and eagerness and delight and if those emotions are missing, the heart is not as it should be. And I wanted to take a moment at the beginning to make that point because this whole chapter is all about emotions – desire, then joy, then anger, then fear, then desire, then joy, then indifference. So we are going to spend a lot of time (two weeks at least) studying the significance of these emotions in worship. And if you have a mindset that says emotions are unimportant, secondary, unreliable, non-essential in worship, then you will miss what this chapter is teaching.

The most emotional being in existence is God. So if you think being non-emotional is a good thing, you are wrong. We should strive to have hearts like God’s own heart, and that means becoming more and more emotional. That is not to say we should be governed by our emotions. Being controlled by your emotions is not a good thing. But not even having the emotions is an even worse thing, because God commands that we have godly emotions.

Some people think that statement is false. They say, “No way could God ever command us to have emotions. He could not command us to feel a certain way, because we do not have any control over how we feel.” That kind of reasoning may sound logical, but it does not square with Scripture. God commands emotions constantly. He commands us to fear Him, to rejoice in Him, to desire Him, to delight in Him, to be appalled at injustice, to love mercy, to crave pure, spiritual milk, to weep with those who weep, to have heartfelt compassion, to grieve over sin, to hope in God’s promises, and to love God with all our hearts. All of those are emotions – things that you feel. God can and does command emotions. And emotions are not completely out of your control. You do not have immediate control over them, but you can do things to nurture them or change them. And ultimately God holds you responsible for what you feel and do n’t feel. That is everywhere in Scripture. So this week and next we are going to learn about worship. And in particular the role various emotions play in true worship. And my prayer and expectation is that by the time we finish chapter 6 we will be better worshippers.

Desire

1 David again brought together out of Israel chosen men, thirty thousand in all.¹

David gathers 30,000 men from all Israel together. That is a huge gathering. What are all these huge masses of Israelites from all over the nation about to do that is so important?

The neglect of the Ark

2 He and all his men set out from Baalah of Judah to bring up from there the Ark of God

They are moving the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. The Ark has not been mentioned in a long time. The last time was in verse 2 of 1 Samuel 7 – 20 years before Saul became king.² Back in the days of Eli, the Philistines defeated Israel and captured the Ark. They took it back to Philistia and put it in the temple of Dagon. But Yahweh kept knocking Dagon over and finally started busting him up, so the Philistines moved the Ark out of there. But everywhere they took it it was a disaster. The people would get terrible tumors and other problems, so finally the Philistines said, “Let’s put this thing on a new cart, hook it up to some cows, and send it back to Israel.” And that is what they did. But when it arrived back in Israel some priests took the liberty of looking inside it. And that was the last thing they ever did.

1 Samuel 6:19 God struck down some of the men of Beth Shemesh, putting seventy of them to death because they had looked into the Ark of the LORD. The people mourned because the LORD struck them with a great slaughter.

Seventy dead in one day just for taking a peek inside the Ark.

1 Samuel 6:21 Then they sent messengers to the people of Kiriath Jearim, saying, "The Philistines have returned the Ark of the LORD. Come down and take it up to your place."

Get this thing out of here. We just lost 70 men – we can’t have this thing here. So that is how it ended up in Kiriath Jearim (which is also called Baalah). And it stayed there through Samuel’s rule, and then the whole 40 years under Saul, and the seven plus years since Saul’s death. So by this time it has been sitting in Baalah (Kiriath Jearim) for at least 70 years. For us that would be like if something were left somewhere back in 1940. I doubt anyone in this room can remember much from before 1940 – near the beginning of World War II. So the Ark has been there since before David and pretty much everyone else in Israel was born. For the most part it was forgotten. It certainly was not in the daily headlines. It is possible a lot of the people had never even heard of the Ark.

So when David re-introduces it to his generation he wants to make sure he does so in a manner that will make it clear to everyone how important it is. If he just had someone Fed-Ex the thing up to Jerusalem and drop it in his driveway, the nation would continue on ignoring it like they had for the past 70 years. So David is going to bring it into Jerusalem with an armed military escort of a massive entourage of 30,000. When one and a half Pepsi Centers full of soldiers march by your house with trumpets and all kinds of other instruments and singing and dancing – you start to wonder if maybe something special is happening.

Now, why did David do this? I am amazed at the conjecture by the commentators. They go on and on about the political advantages and strategies and David trying to establish his new capital or create a new Shiloh, etc. But I do not see anything in 1 or 2 Samuel that indicates any of that. What I do see is the rest of verse 2.

¹ Whenever you see the word “thousand” in Samuel it can also be translated “clans.” The Hebrew word can be used either way, and many scholars take it to mean clans because otherwise it is hard to imagine some of the huge numbers you end up with in these armies if we take it to mean thousands. Although, in this case 30,000 is really not an unreasonable number, so it could very well mean thousands here, because David was rounding up people from the entire nation for a very special event.

² The reference in 1 Samuel 14:18 is probably of the ephod, not the Ark.

The Presence of God

2 ...He and all his men set out from Baalah of Judah to bring up from there the Ark of God which is called by the Name, the name of the LORD of hosts

“Name” is repeated – that is the emphasis. A person’s name is the way that person is known. So God’s name is that which may be known about God. It is God’s self-revelation to us that enables us to know Him and have communion and fellowship with Him. In some ways God is distant and transcendent and unknowable and impossible to approach. But in other ways God has made Himself knowable and accessible to man. And the Ark represented that part – the side of God that is turned toward man – that is knowable and that can be experienced by man.

Another way of saying all that is “the presence of God.” God is everywhere present but He is not doing the same thing in every place. In every square inch of the universe God is present to sustain – upholding the laws of physics and enabling the creation to exist and function. In hell God is present to punish. But most of the time when Scripture speaks of God’s presence it is not talking about His presence to sustain or His presence to punish; it is talking about His presence to bless. And the Ark was the locus of God’s special presence to bless. It was the place where He could be approached, and His attributes could be experienced in the greatest way.

You hear me speak often about experiencing the presence of God. What I mean by that is experiencing His attributes. When you experience an attribute of God – His love or His mercy or His wrath or His patience or His justice – you are experiencing His presence. So by making such an emphasis on the fact that the Ark is associated with God’s name the writer is making sure we understand that it represented the presence of God.

The other main emphasis is about the greatness and majesty and authority of God

2 ...which is called by the Name, the name of the LORD of hosts, who is enthroned between the cherubim that are on the Ark.

God is pictured as being on an invisible throne above the Ark, with the Ark as His footstool. The Ark was not an idol representing Yahweh. It was a box representing Yahweh’s footstool.

And God is called **Yahweh of hosts**. The word “hosts” means “armies.” “**Yahweh of hosts**” is a title that points to the greatness of God who is served by armies of angels who do His bidding. That shows His greatness.

Cherubim are awesome, spectacular, glorious heavenly creatures who stand like guards around the throne of God in heaven. And when God told Moses how the Ark was to be constructed he told him to construct cherubim on both ends.

Exodus 25:18-22 And make two cherubim out of hammered gold at the ends of the cover. 19 Make one cherub on one end and the second cherub on the other; make the cherubim of one piece with the cover, at the two ends. 20 The cherubim are to have their wings spread upward, overshadowing the cover with them. The cherubim are to face each other, looking toward the cover. 21 Place the cover on top of the Ark and put in the Ark the Testimony, which I will give you. 22 There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the Ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.

So this extended description of God in verse 2 points us to the significance of the Ark. It is not just a religious relic. It is the locus of the presence of an awesome, powerful, supreme, glorious, holy God.

David loved the presence of God

So why did David want to bring it to Jerusalem? It is simple - David loved being near the presence of God. Remember when David realized he was going to have to leave Israel to escape being killed by Saul?

1 Samuel 26:20 Now do not let my blood fall to the ground far from the presence of the LORD.

He hated the thought of leaving Israel because he so longed to be near the presence of the Lord. It is not rocket science figuring out why David wanted the Ark in Jerusalem. David was a man who loved the presence of God – it is as simple as that. No doubt David also realized that the throne of God and the throne of the human king of Israel should be in the same place, to show that the latter is an extension of the former. And there may have been some other reasons, but the point the author of Holy Scripture is making under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is that David wanted the Ark in Jerusalem because he loved God and he longed to be near the presence of God.

David inquired of the Lord

And one of the reasons David loved the presence of God is because he was a man who inquired of the Lord before he ever did anything. He is constantly seeking guidance from God, so he needs everything God has provided that offered more access to God. The whole reason why the Ark ended up being shelved all this time is because Saul had no interest in inquiring of the Lord.

1 Chronicles 13:3 Let us bring the Ark of our God back to us, for we did not inquire of it during the reign of Saul.

Saul never bothered to bring the Ark to his capital because he really did not care about inquiring of the Lord. In 1 Samuel 14 Saul started to inquire of the Lord about what to do in a battle, but then when it was taking too long he just cut the whole thing off right in the middle and made his own call. At the end of his life he asked God for guidance and when it did not come quickly enough he ran off to the medium at Endor. And we found when we studied those passages that if you seek guidance from God, but you are unwilling to wait however long God decides to delay your answer, and you are willing to revert to your own judgment or some sinful alternative, then that is not a real inquiring of the Lord. And so the Ark remained in Abinadab's house all that time because Saul just did not care about it. But David did. He is desperate to receive guidance from God at every turn, and so he wants the Ark near him.

The New Cart

So the first emotion we see in this chapter is desire. David longs for the nearness of the presence of God, and that is why he goes to get the ark. And so he gathers people from across the nation together, and one day Abinadab hears a knock at his door, opens it up and there are 30,000 Israelites on his front lawn. And David says, "We're here for the Ark." And David gets the Ark and they load it up and head off toward Jerusalem.

3 They set the Ark of God on a new cart

1 Chronicles 13:7 They moved the Ark of God from Abinadab's house on a new cart

They use a new cart to show respect. You have to have a new cart, because if you use an old cart – who knows that that cart might have been used for. You do not want to transport the Ark on a cart that has been used to haul manure or a dead body or some unclean, unholy thing. And they cannot just look up a cartfax report for a history of the cart, so they use a new cart.

Joy

The next emotion we see in this chapter is joy.

3 ... Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, were guiding the new cart 4 with the Ark of God on it, and Ahio was walking in front of it. 5 David and the whole house of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the LORD, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, sistrums and cymbals.

What are they so excited about? Before this no one even cared about the Ark – now they are dancing with all their might they are so happy. They were in the presence of God. That is what it is like to experience the favorable presence of God – it brings joy to the heart. It is the most delightful experience there is in life – by far. Nothing compares to it. The effect of the favorable presence of God on the human heart is pleasure and joy

and delight. If you were to experience it right now in the degree they experienced it, you would be absolutely beside yourself with happiness.

Transporting the Ark Philistine style

But there is a problem. They made an effort to show respect, but in reality what they are actually doing is showing inexcusable disrespect. This is not the right way to move the Ark. God had made it very clear in His Law how He wanted the Ark to be transported.

Numbers 4:15 "... when the camp is ready to move, the Kohathites are to come to do the carrying. But they must not touch the holy things or they will die.

When God gave Moses the design specs for the Ark, He told him to build it with gold rings, and the Kohathites were to put poles through those rings and carry the poles on their shoulders. That was the only authorized way to move the Ark. But instead of that they just put it on a cart. Maybe they figured it would go faster that way – more efficient.

This is not the first time the Ark went on a cart ride. Back in 1 Samuel 6, when the Philistines had captured the Ark and had to return it because Yahweh was bullying their gods, they sent it back on a new cart. So David is transporting the Ark Philistine style.

Ahio is up front guiding the cart, and his brother Uzzah is in the back, walking right behind the cart. Why? What is he doing back there? He is walking back there just in case they hit some bumps or side hill or something and the Ark starts to slide off the cart. Why didn't they just put some bungee cords on it or something? The Ark has rings built right in to it – why not get a piece of rope and secure it to the cart? No need. Why do that when Uzzah can just walk behind and grab it if it starts to slide? You see, this was the plan all along. When you first read about what happened to Uzzah you think, "I can't believe God killed Uzzah just because he had reflexes." But Uzzah was not judged for reflexes. God's Word was crystal clear that the Kohathites were never to touch the Ark. And Uzzah planned all along that he would touch it if need be.

When you go out of your way to show honor and respect to God, but you do so in a way that is different from the way God Himself has prescribed in His Word, that amounts to dishonor and disrespect. God does not want a new cart – He wants obedience. There are millions of people who claim to be serving God, but they do so in a self-styled way. And God will not accept that. And so what happens next really should be no surprise.

Anger

Uzzah dies

6 When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the Ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. 7 The LORD's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the Ark of God.

It should not be any surprise to anyone that Uzzah died. If anything is a surprise it is that no one else died. Everyone involved with transporting the Ark on a cart was in disobedience to God. But for a Kohathite to touch the Ark – that was especially serious and God instantly strikes him dead.

David reacts

And it makes David mad.

8 Then David was angry because the LORD's wrath had broken out against Uzzah, and to this day that place is called Perez Uzzah.

David is mad at God now. When you get mad at someone it is because you think that person did something wrong. Any time a person becomes angry at God it is because the person believes God did

something wrong. Did God do something wrong? Was He too severe against Uzzah? Well, what did Uzzah do? He desecrated the Ark of the Covenant. Is that a big sin or a small sin?

Irreverence

One of the reasons why this story is such a shock to our system is because we have a man-centered idea of sin. What is it that makes sin evil? The man-centered mindset tends to think the only real evil is when you harm people. If no one gets hurt, it just does not seem like it could be that evil. But if someone gets hurt really bad, or a lot of people get hurt, then it seems really evil.

But hurting human beings is not the standard of what makes something evil. What makes something evil is if it strikes a blow against the glory of God. The greatest reality in the universe is the glory of God, and so anything that throws mud or manure on His name and His glory, anything that makes God seem less glorious than He is, that is the definition of evil.

And, secondarily, whatever diminishes the splendor of God's glory is the very thing that does the most harm to people anyway. If you are negligent and as a result someone loses an eye, or a leg – that is bad. You have done some harm. But if you do or say something that clouds a person's ability to see the glory of God you have done that person a far greater harm; the greatest harm you could possibly do them, because nothing profits and benefits a person more than seeing the glory of God – seeing God in a way that draws their heart to love Him. So nothing harms and destroys a person more than when God's glory is clouded or obscured.

Human touch is worse than dirt

So what was it that Uzzah did that threatened to obscure the glory of God so much? He touched the Ark. But isn't that better than letting it crash to the ground into the mud? No. There is nothing in the law about preventing dirt from touching the Ark – just human touch. Why? Because human touch is worse than dirt. Dirt is not sinful. Dirt has not rebelled against God. There is no sin or wickedness or unholiness in dirt. But human beings are guilty of cosmic treason every single time they sin. We are sinful and unholy, and so our touch is infinitely worse than dirt. You could pile manure on the Ark of the Covenant 100 feet deep and it would not desecrate and dishonor it as much as a human touch. Uzzah's mistake was thinking that his hands were more holy than dirt. That is why verse 7 calls what Uzzah did an **irreverent act**.

Despising holy things

Uzzah grew up with the Ark in his house. He was a son of Abinadab. It was there ever since he was born – just like the coffee table and the sofa. Evidently he had become so accustomed to holy things that he forgot they were holy. God wants us to draw near to Him and to call Him "Abba, Father" and to seek intimate fellowship with Him as His children. However there is a kind of over-familiarity that amounts to what Scripture calls despising. We use the word "despise" to mean hate, but that is not what it means in Scripture. Whenever you see that term in the Bible it means "to think little of." When you think something is no big deal, no real importance, common, mundane, not worthy of much thought or attention – that is despising. It does not mean you hate it. It just means you think little of it.

And when you have daily access to holy things you can fall into the error of Uzzah and start to despise them – think little of them. What is the equivalent of the Ark today? Where is the holy place and the presence of God? Where is the Temple of the Holy Spirit and the saints of the Most High God? The Church. The Church is the equivalent of the Ark. But we come here week after week, and we see the problems (like Uzzah saw dust collect on the Ark growing up), and we slide into indifference about holy things. Church this morning? Oh, well, I don't know – I've got to get the house ready for company tomorrow. I don't want to miss the game. I was up late watching movies last night and I need to sleep in. Rub shoulders with the saints of the Most High God? Maybe next week. Hear a message that is literally a message directly from God? Naw, I'm good. I've got something else I need to do. Or maybe you go ahead and come, but with an indifferent attitude. Did you forget this morning, on your way here, that you were coming to a holy place in order to come in contact with the same God who struck His priest Uzzah dead?

Or how about the problem of people trying to be innovative in the way they run the church? Instead of the ways God prescribed – keeping the preaching of God's Word at the center of our ministry, there is the temptation to use all kinds of more modern, more appealing methods. Cut the sermon back, give the people a concert, then show some movie clips, do some skits, serve up some coffee, water down the gospel. I mean,

God's ways were OK back in that day, they say, but in these modern times you have got to adapt to a post-modern, multi-media culture. You cannot just preach the Bible in this day and age. How many people today reach out their hand to steady the Church – treating God's holy Bride in ways other than what God has prescribed?

How about the way we treat the saints of the Lord of Hosts? Some of you remember Phil Cruz. My dad and I were sitting on the couch in his living room one day just chatting, and he got a phone call. He answered it and told the person on the other end, "Can I call you back? I'm afraid I can't talk right now. Well, because I've got two servants of the living God sitting here in my living room." When I heard him say that it struck me how lightly I had been taking it up to that point that I was also seated there in the room with two servants of the Living God. And doesn't Scripture say that individual believers are also the temple of the Holy Spirit? Have we been like Uzzah and become so accustomed to holy things and holy people that we forget they are holy? Have we forgotten how severe the warnings are that Jesus gave about mistreating His saints?

Harsher now

When you read about these extreme demonstrations of the holiness of God in the Old Testament, do you tend to think, *Wow, things were harsh back then – I'm glad I'm alive now and not then?*

Hebrews 2:1 We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. 2 For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, 3 how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?

What that is saying is we are in even more danger than the Old Testament people. If the message spoken by angels was so severe that disobedience brought harsh punishment, imagine the consequences if we disobey! It will be a lot more severe for us than it was for them, because we would be rejecting a far greater and far more authoritative message. God is not someone to be trifled with.

Fear

So David gets angry at God. He thinks God did something wrong. He feels like killing Uzzah was too harsh. He lost sight of God's holiness. So he responds first with anger, and then with fear. And then he decides he is going to ditch the Ark.

9 David was afraid of the LORD that day and said, "How can the Ark of the LORD ever come to me?" 10 He was not willing to take the Ark of the LORD to be with him in the City of David. Instead, he took it aside to the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite.

He cannot have that kind of unpredictable disaster just strike out of the blue. The Ark – the presence of God – is just too dangerous. One mistake and you are history. So the whole operation is tabled indefinitely. According to the parallel account in 1 Chronicles it was during this period – after the first attempt to move the Ark, that the wars with the Philistines that we studied last week took place. The Philistines come after David and he defeats them twice. And months go by while the Ark just sits down there in Obed-Edom's living room because David is afraid of God.

This kind of fear destroys desire for God. The chapter started with David desiring the presence of God. Now he does not desire it. Now he would just as soon dump it off somewhere far from his house. The desire he once had is gone.

It is good to fear God, right? Not like this. There is a good kind of fear and a bad kind, and this is the bad kind. "How can I tell if I have the good kind or the bad kind?" Easy – the good kind draws you nearer to God and the bad kind drives you away from God. David's fear here makes him want to be away from the Ark – that is the bad kind.

The good kind is the kind is the kind in Psalm 2.

Psalm 2:11 Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. 12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

The good kind of fear is terrified of the prospect of His displeasure, but flees from that displeasure straight into the arms of His love. The bad kind of fear flees away from His presence altogether.

Usually people have the bad kind of fear when they think that God's wrath is arbitrary. God is liable to just hurt me for no good reason. He might just flare up out of the blue without warning and zap me. I am sinning all the time – failing all the time, and who knows when His patience might just run out and all of a sudden He just drops the hammer on me.

There are a couple of serious problems with that kind of thinking. First, God is not arbitrary. He is a loving father who remembers that we are dust and understands that we are weak and frail. And He *loves* to forgive. He actually *enjoys* showing mercy.

Isaiah 30:18 Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion.

He is not looking for an excuse to slam you – He is looking for an excuse to bless you. If you have a general attitude of repentance about your sin, you do not have to worry about God suddenly blasting you with punishment out of the blue.

Secondly, even if God were arbitrary and harsh and quick to punish, that would be all the more reason to draw near to Him. The only refuge from His wrath is His love, and so pushing away from Him does not make you safer – it puts you in more danger. John Piper tells the story of when he visited a family with a big, huge dog. And Piper's son ran to get something out of their car, and immediately this huge dog was loping after him growling. Before that the dog was real friendly. And the owner said, "Oh, you'd better not run. He's friendly; he just doesn't like it when people run away from him." I do not want to compare God to a dog but I will say that God is the greatest threat to you when you are running away from Him, and He is the least threat to you when you are drawing near to Him. That does not mean you can draw near on your own terms, or that you can take His Word lightly, but it does mean you do not have to be afraid to draw closer to Him.

Maybe you are keeping your distance because you are afraid of what God might call you to do. "I'll stay out here at the fringe, because if I really dive in head first – who knows? God might send me off to some horrible mission field in Africa or something." You are afraid of what God might require if you get close, and so you keep your distance. But what you need to realize is if God is requiring you to go to Africa you are not free from that responsibility just because you have not been attentive to His call. You are just as responsible as you would be if God spoke to you audibly and told you to go. If God is calling you to Africa then your greatest happiness and fulfillment is going to be in Africa. It is ridiculous to think you can improve on God's plan. You are never going to be happy or fulfilled doing something other than what God designed you for.

God blesses the Gittite

The guy to learn from in this story is Obed-Edom, the Gittite. Uzzah is struck dead for reaching out to steady the Ark, but Obed-Edom is not afraid to take it into his house. And as soon as they bring that thing into his house the good times just start to roll for Obed-Edom.

11 The Ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite for three months, and the LORD blessed him and his entire household.

These are some great days for Obed-Edom. The writer does not tell us what form this blessing took, but it was extreme enough and obvious enough that it was clear to everyone what was happening. And it was clear enough that abject fear of the presence of the Ark turned to desire for the presence of the Ark. So God just unloads blessing on this man.

Desire

David was right the first time – the Ark is a good thing to have around. And the blessings on Obed-Edom become so extreme that finally David says, "As dangerous as God's presence is – I want it." So now we are back to where we were at the beginning of the chapter. David desires the presence of God.

12 Now King David was told, "The LORD has blessed the household of Obed-Edom and everything he has, because of the Ark of God."

The first emotion we saw in this chapter was desire, and that was good – desire for the presence of God. Then we saw joy, and that was good. But there was a problem with the joy. They were rejoicing in the presence of God, and that was a wonderfully good thing, but in all their rejoicing they forgot they were worshipping a holy God, and that was a deadly mistake.

Next week we will talk more about joy and how to increase your joy in God. I think that is something we need to learn from our Charismatic friends. One thing about the Charismatics – they tend to have great joy and exuberance in worship, and that is something we desperately need to learn from them. However, people who do well in that area (like David) can sometimes be susceptible to the error the Israelites made here – becoming so enamored with delight in God that they forget that this God they are delighting in is a holy and dangerous God. And the result of that is worship that descends into expressions that are not fitting for the worship of a holy God. And that is exactly what you see in some of the extremes of the Charismatic movement. The chaos of masses of people babbling in unknown languages all at once, people barking in the spirit, “holy” laughter – all kinds of wild extremes. I am not saying the whole Charismatic movement is guilty of that, but I am saying if you are the type who has great emotion in worship, as you should have, you need to watch out for this error. Be careful that you do not become so over-familiar with God that He becomes your “buddy upstairs” instead of an awesome, holy, lethal, dangerous, staggeringly powerful being who must be approached with the utmost respect and honor and, above all, obedience to His Word.

David and the people forgot that and had to learn a hard lesson. And at first the lesson is so hard that David’s desire for God is replaced by fear. But now David has his desire back. How did he get it? By learning about the goodness of God. He watched God bless Obed-Edom and learned how good and wonderful God is, and the desire returned.

And the next thing that will return is his joy, as we will see next week. So now that his desire has returned and his joy is returning, does that mean he is forgetting about the holiness of God again? No. As we will see this time he does it right. He maintains a healthy, good kind of fear of God and this time follows God’s law with regard to how the Ark is to be transported.

If you are afraid of God – afraid to draw near to Him – the solution is to realize that whatever it is you are afraid of losing or suffering – maybe you will indeed lose it or suffer it but the goodness of God makes it worth it. That is why Psalm 2 says **rejoice with trembling**. You tremble before an awesome, holy, authoritative God who can require anything, but at the same time you rejoice in being near that dangerous God because He is so good. As dangerous as He is, there is no alternative. And the only refuge and shelter from what you are afraid of is in Him. Which is why the next verse in Psalm 2 says **Blessed are all those who take refuge in Him**.

Benediction: Psalm 2:11-12 Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. ¹² Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.