

Title: How can the Ark of the Lord come to me?
Text: 2 Samuel
Theme: The Holiness of God
Series: 2 Samuel
Prop Stmtnt: We can only engage with a holy God on his terms.

You may have seen the media series entitled, "He gets us." Oh, he does. The problem is, we don't get him. What we are about to read is weighty. In fact, how we respond to this account will reveal to us whether or not we really believe what we just sang. (Holy, Holy, Holy) Accounts like this reveal the incredible difference between us and God. This is hard to hear and hard to grasp. Without the entire picture, an account like this would make us wonder why anyone would want to trust God, much less love him and joyfully follow him. But if our view of God is not formed and informed by the entire counsel of God, then we will be guilty of creating a domesticated God whom we are comfortable with. But a domesticated God cannot fight for us (as we saw last week) nor save us from our sin.

Read Text:

David was on a roll. He unified the kingdom. He defeated the Jebusites and established Jerusalem as the new capital. He successfully defended Jerusalem by defeating the Philistines and then in a follow-up battle he routed them so badly they retreated to their land giving up all of the territories they had captured 7 years earlier. Israel had never experienced anything like that. I think the closest thing we could imagine would be if the Lions ever won the Super Bowl. Can you imagine what would happen? We have been so accustomed to losing that many of us would find the very idea of being champions out of our range of possibility. For Israel, their experience at loss has for the most part defined them for over 400 years. But now, they were a kingdom and people were buying the hats and jerseys. People believed in them and outsiders feared them. The kingdom was being reborn as was their faith in Yahweh. It was an exciting time to be a citizen of Israel.

But David recognizes a major problem. The nation had a home with secure borders. He had a home in Jerusalem with secure walls where his throne sat in this palace. But, the throne of God was not in its proper home. The ark of the covenant (pic) had been captured by the Philistines almost 70 years ago. You may remember that account in the early chapters of 1 Samuel. The towering idol of Dagon kept falling down before the Ark, a pandemic broke out amongst the Philistines, and in a panic, they returned the Ark to Israel, where it stayed in Kiriath-Jearim (now called Baale-Judah) until someone could figure out what to do with it. The tabernacle was apparently still at Shiloh, but without the Ark, what good would that do?

The Ark of the Covenant was the singular piece of furniture that for hundreds of years summarized the story of Israel. The Ark was designed to be the place where the glory of God sat. This was his throne on earth. God ruled. He was the ruler. The Ark was a reminder that Israel was to live under the rulership of God. The top of the Ark was called the Mercy Seat. Once a year, the high priest would pour the blood of an animal on the Mercy Seat. That animal

had been sacrificed for the sins of the people. So, the represented God's rule and God's mercy. The only way for God to be able to live with his people was if God was merciful and it was through the offering of an innocent sacrifice that God could be merciful. No other nation had this. God was dwelling with his people. He lived with them and his plan was to rule over them. If Israel was going to take their role seriously then they needed to establish the dwelling place of God (the tabernacle) not only in a prominent place, but the nation had to have a functioning tabernacle complete with the Ark if the nation was going to celebrate her holy days properly.

1. **We have to deal with God.** (1-4)

David makes the decision to "*bring up from there the ark of God*" and David is not going to do this in stealth mode. The coming of the Ark of the Covenant to the new capital of the people of God is worthy of a major celebration with representation from the entire nation. This is a massive event. 30,000 soldiers are gathered by David. David is personally involved in this. "*David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baale-Judah to bring up the ark of God.*" If the king is personally involved then this is a very important matter.

The narrator underscores this when he reminds the reader that the ark of God is called by the name of the LORD of hosts who sits enthroned on the cherubim. LORD is the covenant name of God that he is known as by his people. LORD of hosts refers to the fact that Yahweh is all-powerful. All supernatural forces (angels) are under his direct command. You can understand why Israel went and got the Ark out of the Tabernacle and took it with them into battle way back in 1 Samuel 4. God is powerful. We are the people of God. No one can defeat God; therefore, we will win. The problem was, Israel wanted God to fight for them while they were living in rebellion to him. They were no different than the Philistines. God was not then nor now going to be used like a rabbit's foot or a good luck charm. He is God. He sets the terms for us and we do not get to change those or find excuses why we do not have to obey him. He is God and we have to deal with him.

This is particularly helpful for us. What has just happened to Israel? They came together in order to defeat the Jebusites, then they came together again to defeat the Philistines who invaded them twice. It is logical and necessary to come together when you are being attacked. But, being attacked may bring people together but it won't keep them together. The people of God need to have way more than a common enemy, they need to come together for the purpose of living in the presence and favor of God. That is what this account is about. We really need to keep this mind. Every Sunday I could speak to another moral, cultural, political, economic, environmental, ethical, and spiritual crisis. They never end. These issues stir us up and they should. But what we are attacked with will not sustain us. We are not defined by the causes that come against but by our God who lives among us.

Life in Israel is heading in a better direction but life is not where it should be. The life of Israel was designed to function around the tabernacle. The tabernacle was like the sun and the tribes were like the planets that orbited around it. Everyone was to come to God. Sacrifices for sin, and offerings of thanksgiving were to be given. God was to be seen as the center of life and the

reason why they were a nation and why they were different than all of the other nations. This was how it was supposed to be. But that was not how it was. The Ark of the Covenant was sitting in the house of Abinadab. It now belonged in Jerusalem and David, with great fanfare and celebration was bringing it to its new home. This truly was a reason for celebration. No other nation had the Sovereign Creator God as their God. That Shekinah Glory cloud was a real deal. But, how do we get the Ark all the way to Jerusalem? Someone came up with the idea of a cart that would be pulled by a team of oxen.

A. Our ideas are never better than God's.

When God gave Moses instructions about the Tabernacle and the pieces of furniture (book of Exodus) he made it explicitly clear as to how the Ark was to be transported. The Ark was designed with rings through which long poles would go so that 4 Levitical priests could carry it. It was never to be put on a cart, even if the cart was brand new and built for the occasion. The ark had been in the house of Abinadab which was on a hill. 70 years before, Eleazer, the son of Abinadab was set apart to be in charge of the Ark. He had probably died by this time and now Uzzah and Ahio (could mean brother) who were descendants of Abinadab were driving the cart that carried the ark.

B. Don't mess with what is sacred.

The Philistines captured the Ark and brought it into their temple to Dagon way back when Samuel was a child. You remember that the idol of Dagon fell down before the Ark that night. Dagon fell down in his own temple before the Ark. They propped it back up only for it to fall down again the next night and it broke into a few pieces. After a few more mishaps, the Philistines finally sent it back to Israel. The men of Beth-shemesh (Israel) were intrigued by it and decided to take a look inside. 70 of them did that and 70 of them died. God doesn't play favorites. Philistine or Israeli, don't mess with what is sacred. This terrified the people of that town, and it should have. You don't mess with what is sacred. So, the people of that town sent messengers to another town nearby called Kiriath-Jeirim and asked them if they wanted the ark and they came and got it and put it in Abinadab's house. This is where Uzzah grew up. He would have known that story. That was the reason why the ark was in his house. His family was charged with taking care of it. Uzzah was in the tribe of Levi and he was in the line of Levi called the Kohathites who were charged with handling the ark. Uzzah knew what God said and it was abundantly clear. You do not touch the Ark. No human was permitted to touch the Ark. But we are tempted to do things our way and assume that our good intentions somehow will earn us a pass with God.

2. We have to deal with God on his terms. (5-7)

David and all the house of Israel are rightfully celebrating the return of the Ark to the center of life for Israel. We looked at the account in 1 Samuel 4, that turned out to be one of the darkest days in the history of Israel. They were decisively defeated by the Philistines. The two sons of the High Priest were killed in the battle. The Ark of the Covenant was captured by the Philistines

and the High Priest, Eli, died. On that day, when his daughter-in-law was giving birth to a son, she named him Ichabod because the glory of Israel was gone from Israel. No one then could imagine this day now. The ark had come back but it was on the fringe. Now, in full view for the entire nation, the glory of God and therefore the glory of Israel was coming back! But then, the ox cart stumbles at the threshing floor of Nacon. Uzzah put his hand out and took hold of it because the oxen stumbled. We can only speculate that he was concerned that it would fall off the cart or would be damaged in some way. Someone gasps, others shout, then come the screams and the music stops. Uzzah is dead. He is lying there beside the Ark of God. After looking at Uzzah, all eyes turn toward David. The celebration is over. The festivities are stopped. Everyone is in shock.

Verse 7 is clear. God struck Uzzah down. The anger of the LORD was kindled (lit up) against Uzzah. Uzzah touched the Ark and God killed him. What is David supposed to do now? What are we supposed to do with this? First of all, a text like this would be cancelled by our culture and sadly by many churches since it would not be considered to be safe theology. We do not measure theology by whether it is safe or not, but whether or not it is true. Secondly, if I was amassing a collection of stories into a book that I called God's Word that was intended to attract people to "my religion" then I would include this one. How many times have you heard that accusation? The Bible is all man-made. Obviously, God used men to record, write, edit, copy and preserve his Word. But it is God who is the ultimate author and overseer of this work. Stories like this make that clear. We wouldn't include those on our own. So, why did this happen and why on earth did God see to it that this account was included in his Word?

3. Dealing with God is serious. (8-10)

God is different than us. He is separate from us. The word for that is holy. He is set apart. Fundamentally and intrinsically his righteousness sets him apart from us. He is so pure that his righteousness is a white-hot righteousness. That is who he is. He does not change. We are not righteous. We are sinners. What is sin? Sin is our acts and thoughts of rebellion against God. We have flipped God off and basically told him that he can go to hell. Our sin makes us guilty and worthy of judgment. No person was permitted to touch the Ark. But it was falling! It could have hit the ground. Uzzah was doing a good thing. Almost 40 years ago now, I read R.C. Sproul's comments on this event. R.C. said of Uzzah, "*He stretched out his hand and placed it squarely on the ark, steadying it in place lest it fall to the ground. An act of holy heroism? No! It was an act of arrogance, a sin of presumption. (Slide) Uzzah assumed that his hand was less polluted than the earth. But it wasn't the ground or the mud that would desecrate the ark; it was the touch of man. The earth is an obedient creature. It does what God tells it to do. ... When water is added to the dust, it becomes mud, just as God designed it. The ground doesn't commit cosmic treason. There is nothing polluted about the ground.*" (The Holiness of God, p.141)

How can God live among us without destroying us? He can't unless our sin is atoned for. The Ark was not the only piece of furniture in the tabernacle. Outside of the actual tabernacle was the bronze altar where the priests would offer the sacrifices. The altar was before the tabernacle because only by means of an atoning sacrifice could you approach God. Now, don't

forget this very important truth. God set it up this way so that we could have fellowship with him. He did this so that he could live among us. God is not looking for reasons to wipe people out but for reasons to rescue us. But, no one can approach God on their own terms. They have to come to God on his terms. Now you can begin to understand just how profound and sacred and powerful the death of Christ was. His sacrificial death was the perfect offering of a sacrifice that was so infinitely pure because it was Christ who offered it. He, the white-hot righteous God offered a white-hot offering for the sins of every single person who would ever believe in him. That is called atonement. Only Christ could do that. Again, you hear people say that it is arrogant and prideful to claim that there is only one way to God. I think, are you kidding me? It is ignorant and offensive to claim that there is any other way. I think Dane Ortlund is spot on when he says, **(slide)** *"The astonishing surprise at the heart of the universe is not that there is only one way to get to heaven. The astonishing surprise is that there is any way to get to heaven for miserable sinners such as us."*

I suspect that there are many of you who are hearing this who are trying to get your heads around this. Good. This is not fun and games stuff. If we really understood who we were worshipping, there's a sense in which the ushers would not be handing out bulletins but would be giving us helmets and Kevlar body armor. People who are casual about God, have no clue as to who God is. It is when we start to understand who he is, then we are finally ready to face who we are and how much we need him. David had a lot to learn. How does he react? He is angry! He is "angry because the LORD burst forth against Uzzah." Burst forth? That is the same language that David used to describe how God attacked the Philistines in the previous chapter. Why? We don't know exactly. Angry that Uzzah died? Angry that God ruined his big day? Angry that God didn't cut Uzzah and David some slack because they were trying to do something good? But then that anger turned to fear. Beloved, this is a good step. David's anger was prideful but his fear was the result of some humility and he asked a very good question. *"How can the ark of the Lord come to me?"*

That's it!! How can this all-powerful, holy God dwell with sinful people? Through an atoning, wrath-appeasing sacrifice. And that is exactly what Christ accomplished through his death. When Christ died, the curtain was torn in two. Not so that God could get out, but so we would know that once and for all, the way to God was now open because of, and only because of Christ.

4. God loves to bless. (11)

Obed-edom was a Gittite. Who else was a Gittite? Goliath! Obed-edom was a Philistine from the city of Gath who was living in that area and David put the Ark of the Covenant in his house. Obviously, Obed-edom treated it with respect that he should and the Lord blessed him and his house! He was a Philistine! Yes, but he respected God and I would argue, he trusted him. One day, Philistine believers, Jewish believers, Asian, African, European, American (north and south) believers will live with God and enjoy him forever. This was a preview.

In his 4th book in the Chronicles of Narnia series, called, *The Silver Chair*, Lewis describes Aslan (the great lion who represents Christ) as resting before a stream. A girl named Jill comes across Aslan at a time when she is extremely thirsty, but in spite of being parched, she is terrified by the presence of this lion. Like David, she did not know what to do. Then Aslan spoke, "if you're thirsty, you may drink." Jill was more than thirsty, she was parched, but the lion was just too frightening so she said, "I daren't come and drink." Aslan said, "Then you will die of thirst." "Oh dear!" cried Jill. But then she said, "I supposed I must go and look for another stream then." Aslan said, "There is no other stream."