

Broomfield



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 5 Issue 3

January 29, 2006

God in the Hands of Frightened Sinners, Part 2

A Bitter/Sweet Relationship

When Jesus walked the earth, His disciples enjoyed a close relationship with Him. They prayed with Christ,¹ walked with Him,² sat at His feet and received profound lessons on life and the Kingdom,³ suffered with Him,⁴ and some even wept in His presence.⁵ And yet it came at quite a cost.

Think of the time when Peter was rebuked by Christ; the Lord called him, “Satan!”⁶ Christ foretold of the disciples' death — how agonizing would it have been to hear these words from Him.⁷ And after denying the Lord and the rooster crowed, Christ looked into Peter's eyes and broke him.

Luke 22:60b-62, “And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.”

A relationship with Christ meant for the disciples not only great joy on account of the rich fellowship, but also intense pain, conviction, having ones inner-most thoughts and motives exposed⁸ and enduring the penetrating eyes of the Lord! And that is perhaps why we read in the New Testament of “secret disciples.”⁹ They were men and women who got close enough to enjoy some of the blessing. Yet they remained far enough away so as not to risk getting hurt — either from the world or Christ!

Such has been the temptation for Christ's disciples throughout Redemptive History. In fact, we see it in our passage — exemplified in the Ark.

¹ Compare Matthew 26:26

² Compare Matthew 4:18-22

³ Compare Matthew 5-7

⁴ Compare John 15:20

⁵ Compare John 20:11, 14

⁶ Compare Matthew 16:23

⁷ Compare John 21:18

⁸ Compare Hebrews 4:12-13

⁹ Compare John 19:38

The Ark Identified

At this time in redemptive history, the Ark of the Covenant was nothing less than a portal into a deep and abiding relationship with God.

Exodus 25:21-22 “And thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the ark; and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee. And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel.”

What a blessing! It was through this religious “icon” that God communed with His people. And yet it came at a cost. It meant at times sitting under rebuke. It meant having ones heart exposed before the One with whom we have to do. It meant undergoing discipline which at times may seem brutal and harsh.

And that's exactly what occurred in the opening chapters of 1 Samuel. On account of their abuse of the Ark — and so their relationship with God — Eli, Hophni and Phinehas were deposed from office.¹⁰ Would-be servants suffered under severe discipline in which 30,000 men were slaughtered on the battlefield.¹¹ A majority of the population of Bethshemesh died.¹²

So what did these frightened sinners do?

Just like the secret disciples of the Lord, they endeavored to move far enough away from the Lord such that they might enjoy the blessings of a relationship with God — albeit limited — and yet be free from the risk and pain.

This is what is going on in our text. We saw last time that their first inclination was to cope with God through superstition — they moved the Ark to a high place. This same theme, distance, is shown also in their second inclination — distance through relegation.

Coping Through Relegation

1 Samuel 7:1, “And the men of Kirjathjearim came, and fetched up the ark of the LORD, and brought it into the house of Abinadab in the hill, and sanctified Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the LORD.”

As was mentioned last time, after the Ark arrived in Israel at the frontier city of Bethshemesh, the people of this city placed it on a large rock — undoubtedly covered. Seventy of the men lifted the veil and gazed upon it — and thus were struck down. And the people of God once again were traumatized by His holiness.

Now, the elders of Bethshemesh sought to place the Ark in a place where God might be pacified — and that place was the city of Kirjathjearim on account of the fact that it was a high place. Well amazingly the

¹⁰ Compare 1 Samuel 2:12-36

¹¹ Compare 1 Samuel 4:10

¹² Compare 1 Samuel 6:19

men of Kirjathjearim responded to the plea of the Bethshemites, and came down and took possession of the Ark!

Now this is rather peculiar — for as we have seen, the track record of the Ark has not been a safe one. It seems of late that everyone who comes near this holy vessel dies. Again, think of Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas. They all lost their lives on account of the Ark. Eli died when he heard it had been lost.¹³ And Hophni and Phinehas died when they used it as a lucky charm in battle.¹⁴

The soldiers had a similar experience with the Ark. Without the ark in battle, 4,000 died at the hands of the Philistines. But with the Ark, Israel lost 30,000 men in a battle which was described as a slaughter.¹⁵

Then you have the Philistines after they took possession of this religious article.¹⁶ Recall that everywhere the Ark went while amongst the Philistines, death came. In fact, it got so bad that the Ark was passed around the cities of the Philistines like a “hot potato.”¹⁷ The destruction became so widespread that eventually the Philistines determined to give it back to Israel.

Now with the Ark back in the possession of Israel we would expect that everyone would live “happily-ever-after.” But again the account doesn't end this way. As I just referenced, now death has come to the Bethshemites.

Why?

Well, where is the Ark?

So it is curious indeed that when the men of Kirjathjearim received the request to come and take the Ark to their city, they did not call a council of the elders as did the Ekronites in chapter 5.

1 Samuel 5:10-11, “Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron. And it came to pass, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, They have brought about the ark of the God of Israel to us, to slay us and our people. So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go again to his own place, that it slay us not, and our people: for there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there.”

Indeed, rather than calling such an assembly, the men of Kirjathjearim willingly come — almost zealously! And that brothers and sisters, is the key to understanding the second response of these frightened sinners.

Why were the men of Kirjathjearim so willing to take the Ark?

How is it that they thought they could care for the Ark when so many others had failed?

The answer lies with the family with whom they sought to entrust the Ark — the family of Abinadab.

¹³ Compare 1 Samuel 4:18

¹⁴ Compare 1 Samuel 4:11

¹⁵ Compare 1 Samuel 4:10

¹⁶ Compare 1 Samuel 5-6

¹⁷ Compare 1 Samuel 5-6

Now if you study Abinadab and his family you will find that there is very little said about him. He is referenced in a hand-full of passages- here; 2 Samuel 6; and 1 Chronicles 13. And thus Bible dictionaries have very little to say about him.

For example, Harper's Bible Dictionary says only that he was “a prominent man from Kireath-jearim, who had custody of the Ark after its return from the Philistines until David moved it to Jerusalem (1 Samuel 7:1; 1 Chronicles 13:7).”¹⁸

Well that wasn't much help. We gleaned this from our text!

Yet, you say, Harper's is not the greatest Bible dictionary. What about The New Bible Dictionary?

Well, The New Bible Dictionary doesn't even contain an entry under the name of “Abinadab.”

How about Zondervan's Pictorial Bible Dictionary — one of the best? It doesn't say a whole lot more than Harper's. “A man living in Kiriath-jearim to whose home the ark was brought from the land of the Philistines.”¹⁹

Indeed! There is very little stated about Abinadab or his family. However what is given in Scripture is of great significance. Twenty years following our text, we read in 2 Samuel 6 that David has opted to move the ark from Kirjathjearim to Jerusalem. You know the text.

2 Samuel 6:3-7, “And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab²⁰, drave the new cart. And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab which was at Gibeah, accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark. And David and all the house of Israel played before the LORD on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals.

“And when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God.”

Now we've talked about this passage before and the key to understanding the actions of God here. Uzzah died for “irreverence” when he was attempting to protect the Holy Ark from falling to the ground.

While this may seem like “reverence” to me it wasn't for the fact that Uzzah was a Kohathite²¹ — a priestly order charged with the care of the Ark!

Numbers 4:4-5, “This shall be the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the

¹⁸ Achtemier, Paul J., Th.D., *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc.) 1985.

¹⁹ *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, Merrill C. Tenney, Editor, page 4.

²⁰ Uzzah and Ahio would therefore be Eleazar's brothers.

²¹ As this was not the lawless times of the Judges, there is little doubt that David would have used the institutions that God established when it came to service God's Kingdom (cf. 1 Samuel 15 where Saul did not use the institutions that God had established). Accordingly, there is very little question that in his desire to move the Ark to Jerusalem, David would have utilized the order of priests commissioned to move the ark — the Kohathites (again cf. Numbers 4). Thus, it is believed by many if not most Bible scholars that Uzzah was a Kohathite.

congregation, about the most holy things: And when the camp setteth forward, Aaron shall come, and his sons, and they shall take down the covering vail, and cover the ark of testimony with it.”

Numbers 4:15, “And when Aaron and his sons have made an end of covering the sanctuary, and all the vessels of the sanctuary, as the camp is to set forward; after that, the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it: but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die. These things are the burden of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the congregation.”

Accordingly Uzzah would have been trained from the earliest of age regarding the transportation of the Ark. R. C. Sproul put it this way:

“Uzzah was a Kohathite. He knew exactly what his duties were. He had been trained thoroughly in the discipline of his calling. He understood that God had declared that the touching of the Ark of the Covenant was a capital offense. No Kohathite, under any circumstance, was ever permitted to touch the ark. No emergency was grounds for breaking that inviolate command... An act of holy heroism? No! It was an act of arrogance, a sin of presumption. Uzzah assumed that his hand was less polluted than the earth.”²²

So what do we learn from 2 Samuel 6 about the family of Abinadab?

Simply that they were Kohathites — that order of priest charged with the care of the Ark!

With this information, let's go back to our passage!

When we read here that the frightened Bethshemites appeal to the men of Kirjathjearim to come and take the Ark, AND THE MEN OF KIRIATH-JEARIM SUBMIT WITHOUT COMPLAINT, we now understand why. Not only did these frightened sinners try to cope through superstition, but the obvious and secure plan was to RELEGATE “the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of hosts who sits above the cherubim”²³ to a priestly order charged with its care!

And that is exactly what they do here. Look with me one more time at this text. Notice what the men of Kirjathjearim do with the Ark, “[they] brought it into the house of Abinadab on the hill.” Obviously this was their plan all along — and hence their willingness and zeal. In fact, they not only bring it to Abinadab, but they also consecrated Eleazar his son to keep the Ark of the Lord.

Relegate it to a Professional

The word for consecrate or sanctify²⁴ is used to describe the state of consecration effected by Levitical ritual. What that means here is that Eleazar didn't just say, “Sure! You can store the Ark in my barn.” Rather, through a ceremony, he was specially set apart for its care.²⁵ This meant that from this point on his life would revolve around overseeing, protecting, and keeping the Ark.

From this we glean another response of frightened sinners to God: They relegate the Lord to a professional — someone set apart unto that end; someone called to watch over it for a living. And that

²² R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, pp. 140, 141.

²³ Compare 1 Samuel 4:4

²⁴ קָדַשׁ qadash

²⁵ Compare Exodus 28:3, 41

constitutes the second response of frightened sinners to God: They cope through relegation!

You know as I look at Christianity, I see what could be described as a détente between God and man — a détente initiated by man. We love the thought of salvation. We love the fact God forgave our debt of sin. And that the Lord walks with us, in and through all things. We like it that Jesus is our personal Lord and Savior. But we don't like the mess that this relationship sometimes can create: Discipline, conviction, guilty consciences, someone telling me that I cannot do this or do that, grueling effort to be faithful to the word both its study and its observance.

Brothers and sisters, Christianity is a difficult thing. We've been saved to serve the Lord. And part and parcel of this service is the obligation to learn Christ's will, uphold His standards, and offer ourselves as living and holy sacrifices to the Lord.

So what do we do?

We settle in our walks with God, where we keep the name of Jesus and enjoy the privileges of forgiven sin. But we relegate much of the activities surrounding a relationship with Him to someone or something else.

Now quite frankly, that “someone else” often-times is the preacher. After all he is a seminary trained man. He has insight into God's word. He is a trained counselor. And he is a prayer warrior. After all, isn't that what the preacher is paid for?

That “something else” often is the worship on Sunday morning. That “something else “ can be the pastoral ministry given by the elders of the body, or the various and sundry ministries that are erected in so many churches — like these:

- The Hospitality committee.
- The Missions committee.
- The Outreach committee.
- The Christian Education committee.
- The Worship committee.

After all, in most churches these committees do the work — so that you don't have to!

What's left?

A distant relationship with God wherein you profess that God is good, fear what He still might do, act like everything is wonderful and fine, and hope through it all that God ordains only good things for your life.

You say wait a minute. Isn't there a place for a trained “clergy”? Aren't the elders charged with the pastoral care of the body? Was it wrong for a Kohathite to be charged with the care for the Ark?

In theory there is nothing wrong with trained preachers, Godly men entrusted with the souls of God's people, a Kohathite specially set apart unto the care of the Ark. In fact, we would expect nothing less.

What is wrong is when this is in the context of a passion to flee from God. It is wrong when one uses these men in order to put distance between you and God. It is wrong to allow a trained “professional” to take the place of personal fidelity to the Lord. It is wrong to all a committee to substitute for your service

in the Kingdom of God.

Passion of Christ

This was so clearly epitomized by the movie, *The Passion of Christ*. Thousands upon thousands of Christians flocked to the movie. Many of those hundreds of thousands left in tears. Non-Christians knew that they were invited by their Christian friends as a form of evangelism. And all of this occurred in the name of “enabling people to get a better glimpse at the cross of Christ” and giving “people a greater understanding of Christ’s sacrifice.”

Now I don't know about you, but the last time I looked at the Scripture, the word of God and the Lord’s Supper were given to us to help us get a better glimpse of Christ. This is the reason God gave us His Word and His Sacraments so that we might come to understand better the work of Christ on the cross.

But people didn’t want see we don't want these things — the word/sacraments. After all they say they are too difficult to understand, they do nothing for us, and they require too much work.

So what do we do?

We call upon Mel Gibson. I mean the preacher. I mean the men of Kirjathjearim to come down and take the Ark from us. And we purpose to trek up to Eleazar's house on occasion and give it homage. But to enjoy a personal relationship with God? It's too inconvenient, difficult, and hard.²⁶

You say, “So you have a problem with dramatizations of Bible stories?”

Not at all, I love them. When people are moved more by a movie than the Word of God I have a problem with this. Many Christians saw this movie more than once. And yet, the typical evangelical prays less than two minutes a week, reads the Bible only four times a month, attends church a little over half the time, and never shares the gospel with another person.

Indeed! I'm not ripping the medium of “movies” here; I'm highlighting our aversion to God. We yearn to put distance from God in our walk. We long for a priesthood that will pray in our stead, share the gospel for us, worship in our stead, and illustrate the passion of Christ in our stead. I'm highlighting the sad truth that most Christians would rather see a movie about the Lord, than spend time communing with their Lord in His Word!

Accursed Safety

You say, “O.K. I'm guilty. But I'm safe!”

Oh accursed safety!

Don't miss it. What you gain in the appearance of safety, you forfeit many times over in joy!

Matthew 19:27-29, “Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you,

²⁶ S. G. DeGraaf speaking to children's Bible teachers wrote, “Admittedly, grasping the Bible story from the proper point of view is very difficult for the child, not because his understanding is limited but because his heart says no. Little children have no more room for God in their lives than adults.” (*Promise and Deliverance*, p. 20)

That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.”

I love how David Livingstone put it so long ago:

“People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. Can that be called a sacrifice which is simply paid back as a small part of the great debt owing to our God which we could never repay? Is that a sacrifice which brings its own reward of helpful activity, the consciousness of doing good, peace of mind, and a bright hope of a glorious destiny hereafter? Away with such a word. It is emphatically no sacrifice. It is privilege!

“Anxiety, sickness, suffering or danger now and then, with the foregoing of the common conveniences and charities of this life may make us pause, and cause the spirit to waver and sink, but let this only be for a moment. All of these are nothing when compared with the glory which shall hereafter be revealed in and for us. I never made a sacrifice! Of this we ought not to talk when we remember the great sacrifice which He made who left His Father's throne on high to give Himself for us.”

I close with this appeal. Though everything within us wants distance from God, we must fight the inclination. Jesus Christ in His word has promised to be with us always — even to the end of the age.²⁷

So don't place Christ on a bookshelf. Don't rely upon the “professional” to talk to Him for you. Don't relegate your quiet times to the “professional.” Don't relegate the Ark to an “Eleazar” — whatever that may be in your life.

Rather with renewed vigor, let's take the risk and long for Him. Let us approach the word, not simply for knowledge, but to be laid open and bare before God. Let us avail ourselves to His disciplining hand.

We will not be disappointed!

²⁷ Compare Matthew 28:20

Subscription Information

A subscription to the *Broomfield Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word* is on a free basis. To subscribe or unsubscribe send a post card to *Broomfield Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word*®, Post Office Box 691, Windsor, Colorado 80550. Or you may send your request by email to [Nels Nelson](mailto:Nels.Nelson@broomfieldopc.com). *The Broomfield Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word* is published regularly.

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Broomfield Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Broomfield Presbyterian Church is located at Kohl Elementary School, 10th Street and Kohl, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Broomfield Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. There recording for this sermon can be found at [Relegating God to the Professional](http://broomfieldopc.com/sermons/relegating-god-to-the-professional). The web address for all sermons at Broomfield can be found out as follows: <http://broomfieldopc.sermonaudio.com>

About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on January 29, 2006. Greg is the Preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.