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# The Need for a Healthy Fear of God

2 Samuel 6:1-23

*The Sixth Sermon on Second Samuel*

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Imagine these scene with me. You're at a graveside service and you see someone walking up on their cell phone, laughing. You're at a high school graduation and there is a moment of silence for a student who died tragically, and someone yells out, "Party at Danny's house!" You would agree with me that these are totally inappropriate and irreverent, right? You would agree with me that in life we need to learn respect and reverence, right? So let me ask you this: why is it, then, that when it comes to how we relate to the Almighty God of the universe, so much of what we've been taught in modern Christianity is the complete opposite? Some of us treat God like he's our boyfriend. Some of us treat God like he's an ATM machine. Or we're conditioned to choose a church based on what we can get out of it. We evaluate a church based on how the music made us feel. But where is the God of the Bible in all this?

This morning we pick up in 2 Samuel with a story that is all about the holiness of God and the appropriate reverence that is due to him. We learn here *The Need for a Healthy Fear of God*. I want you to see that as the narrative unfolds. It begins with David going out to regain the Ark of the Covenant, but because of their irreverence, they leave it in the house of a Gentile. Three months later they

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go to get it again, and this time with the appropriate reverence. And as David returns home, he faces the scorn of Saul's family once again in the person of his wife, Saul's daughter, Michal. As this story unfolds, I want to draw out three principles for learning the fear of God:

1. *If You Have Wrong Motivation*
2. *If You Are Ambivalent in Method*
3. *If You View God as Mundane*

May the Holy Spirit leads us into the truth of his Word today.

## **If You Have Wrong Motivation**

*If you have wrong motivation* about God and why you need him, you need to learn a healthy fear of God. We see that at the beginning of the story as **David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand** (v. 1). Keep an eye on that number as we'll come back to it. Then David, these 30,000 men, along with those in Israel from **Baale-judah**, that is, Kiriath-jearim, went out **to bring up from there**, that is, Kiriath-jearim, **the ark of God, which is called by the name of the LORD of hosts who sits enthroned on the cherubim** (v. 2). So notice three details here: 30,000 men, Kiriath-jearim, and the Ark of the Covenant.

What is going on here is the reversal of the Battle of Aphek and the loss of the Ark back in 1 Samuel 4. Remember that Israel was a war with the Philistines. After loosing a battle they sent men to bring the Ark into battle, using it superstitiously like wearing an old Chargers hat during a game as if that's going to

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help them win! But at the Battle of Aphek 30,000 men died. Now 30,000 men go to get the Ark from where it was housed for the past two decades. The Ark was taken from a place of storage to a place of significance.

But why is David doing this? The text is not explicit about why, but as we read the story, I think there are hints that David's motivation was not initially right. In chapters 3 and 5 we've read that David has been multiplying his wives, contrary to the Lord's commands about the King in Deuteronomy 17. He also allows the Ark to be carried on a cart pulled by oxen, which was contrary to the Law of God; as King he should have known this as Deuteronomy 17 says the King was to have his own copy of the Law so he could read it every day. Even more, we'll see that when the Lord strikes down Uzzah, David is angry with God. All this seems to indicate that his motivation was to have the Ark in his possession to legitimize his kingship and give him a symbol of power.

What does this mean for us? This is a warning to you if you think you can use God: if you think that praying a certain mantra is going to get you what you want, if you think that giving money is only going to get you a bunch back, if you think that because you trust in Jesus that you are guaranteed healing, and the list goes on. You cannot use God! Do you think he's a blind fool?

## **If You Are Ambivalent in Method**

As they bring the Ark out of Baale-judah or Kiriath-jearim, we come to the heart of the story. And we learn here that *if you are ambivalent in method* you need

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to learn the fear of God. What do I mean by “method?” I’m talking about how we serve God, how we worship God. If you think that as long as you worship God, but that it doesn’t matter how, then you need to learn this message. If you think God just says in his Word, “Worship me,” and then leaves the rest to our ingenuity, then this story speaks so powerfully to you.

The trouble continues in verse 3 as **they carried the ark of God on a new cart...And Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart, with the ark of God** (vv. 3-4). The last time we saw the Ark on a new cart was when the Philistines put it on a cart and sent it back to Israel (1 Sam. 6:7). But now God’s chosen people put it on a cart! Big deal, right? Wrong! Back in Exodus 24, when the Lord gave the instructions for the tabernacle, which was the place he was to be worshipped, he said that Moses had to make everything “exactly as I show you” (Ex. 24:9). And he said exactly how it was to be carried by have two poles in two rings on each side (Ex. 24:14-15). There was no other way to carry this visible symbol of the Lord’s throne. Later, in Numbers 7:9, the Lord said that the tribe of the Levites could use six wagons or carts and twelve oxen to carry all the materials that made the tabernacle; but, there was one family within the tribe of Levi, the Kohathites, whose job was to carry the Ark of the Covenant by the poles on their shoulders. They could not use a cart.

It’s like we’re watching a huge storm cloud on the horizon, approaching, all the while over here life goes on unaware. And life over here seems so joyful: **David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the LORD, with songs and**

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**lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals** (v. 5). Everyone's getting their liturgical groove on as they come to **the threshing floor of Nacon**, when all of a sudden **Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled** (v. 6). **Uzzah-touched-the-Ark! And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God** (v. 7). "But they were praising God and all Uzzah did was to keep the Ark from falling to the ground and being desecrated." It shouldn't have been on the Ark in the first place; and Uzzah thought his hands were more holy than the very ground he tramped with his feet. You see, brothers and sisters, when it comes to serving God, God doesn't want us to make our own creations, he wants us to follow his instructions. God does want us to use our minds and make up something new, he wants us to follow what his mind has passed down from ancient times. God doesn't want our ingenuity, he wants our humility. But because David didn't lead according to the Law and because Uzzah touched what he was not allowed to touch, just like the Lord "broke out" against the Philistines in the previous chapter, now he broke out against his own people (v. 8). And finally David learned the fear of the Lord that day: **"How can the ark of the LORD come to me?"** (v. 9) You see, when the Lord is not respected and revered, the entire community of God is put at risk.<sup>1</sup> And this is not just an Old Testament doctrine, we read this in 1 Corinthians 11, where people even died for not using the Lord's Supper as Christ commanded.

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<sup>1</sup> Brueggemann, 249.

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So they put the Ark into the house of a Gentile, Obed-edom the Gittite (v. 10), and it stayed there for three months (v. 11). And the amazing thing is that **the LORD blessed Obed-edom and all his household** (v. 11) so that when it was told King David, “**The LORD has blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, because of the ark of God**” ...David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing (v. 12). But this time, David had learned to fear the Lord. This time, after **those who bore the ark of the LORD**—which means they were carrying it on their shoulders by the poles God had commanded—**had gone just six steps, he sacrificed an ox and a fattened animal** (v. 13). After, **David danced before the LORD with all his might** (v. 14). This is hardly what we call “liturgical dance.” This is hardly a justification for pre-scripted dramatic arts in worship. No one is sitting in pews watching a performance here. This is a spontaneous moment of joy due to a major event in the Lord’s work of redeeming his people. The Lord is now visibly entering the midst of his people and there is celebration. Just go onto Youtube and search for the Kimyal tribe of Papua, Indonesia, and see what happened when the Bible was translated into their language—that’s the kind of spontaneous joy our text is describing!

Finally, having learned the true fear of God, the Ark was put **inside the tent that David had pitched for it** (v. 17)<sup>2</sup> and then there were sacrifices (vv. 17–

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<sup>2</sup> But *the* tent (the tabernacle) was in Gibeon throughout David’s reign (1 Chron. 15:16; 16:1–6, 37ff.).

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18), the blessing of the Lord upon the people (v. 18), and a feast before the Lord (v. 19).

## **If You View God as Mundane**

So David goes home, but there's trouble on the home front. It's like he closed the door, sets his keys down, and just as his jacket is coming off his wife pounces on him with her complaint. Wives, we know we're in trouble; just give us a minute! What I want you to see here is the need to learn the fear of God *if you view God as mundane*. Let me explain.

Notice that Michal is called here **the daughter of Saul** (v. 20) to emphasize that David's struggle with Saul continues even after his death. And Michal complains: "**How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' female servants, as one of the vulgar fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!**" (v. 20) Then David responds:

**It was before the LORD, who chose me above your father and above all his house, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the LORD—and I will celebrate before the LORD. I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in your eyes. But by the female servants of whom you have spoken, by them I shall be held in honor.** (vv. 21–22)

She saw this amazing moment in the life of Israel as nothing but a mundane moment. Nothing to see here! And we're not told if she was cursed by God or if she

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and David just never conceived a child, but the end of the story is with Michal having no children until **the day of her death** (v. 23).

The point of this is to challenge any of you here who are just going through the motions. Do you see the Bible, Jesus Christ, church, and worship as just things you have to do every week? Or do you see what we are doing today like David, coming before the Lord of the universe?

You see, brothers and sisters, this story leads us to the one true God who has revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ through his Word. Just like David, we may be tempted to use Jesus for our own personal gain, like Ananias and Saphira in Acts 5. Just like David and Uzzah, we may think we can serve Jesus in our own ways, like those in Corinth. Just like Michal, we may be tempted to view this all as mundane, meaningless stuff, like those Jesus warned in Laodicea who were lukewarm. But let us serve Jesus Christ as he has commanded us in his Word: with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire. Amen.