

The Weight of the Crown

The Ark Returns

2 Samuel 6:1-15

Mark Vroegop

David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. And David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baale-judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the LORD of hosts who sits enthroned on the cherubim. And they carried the ark of God on a new cart and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. And Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart, with the ark of God, and Ahio went before the ark. And David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the LORD, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals. And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. 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. And David was angry because the LORD had broken out against Uzzah. And that place is called Perez-uzzah to this day. And David was afraid of the LORD that day, and he said, "How can the ark of the LORD come to me?" So David was not willing to take the ark of the LORD into the city of David. But David took it aside to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. And the ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months, and the LORD blessed Obed-edom and all his household. And 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." So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing. And when those who bore the ark of the LORD had gone six steps, he sacrificed an ox and a fattened animal. And David danced before the LORD with all his might. And David was wearing a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting and with the sound of the horn (2 Sam. 6:1-15, ESV).

The most consequential and memorable moments in life often involve two emotions: fear and joy.

Let me give you a visual example. Here is a picture from our photo album from 1996, twenty-eight years ago. Sarah and I lived in a parsonage across the street from our church in Holland, Michigan. We drove a Pontiac 6000 with 150,000 miles. Our first dog, Sadie, was adorned with a special scarf. And I'm carrying two car seats into our home for the first time. Fear and joy are what we felt.

On the one hand, we were so thankful and happy. After thirty-nine weeks of carrying twins, Sarah gave birth to our sons, Hayden and Joseph. They weighed 6 lbs., 7 oz. and 6 lbs., 11 oz. at birth. We came home from the hospital two days later. Everyone was doing great!

But we were also scared out of our minds. I was reluctant to have children while in seminary, and the Lord blessed us with two at once. What's more, the senior pastor of the church (where I was the youth

pastor) took a call to another church, and we had no idea what our future would hold. We were so happy and so scared.

Now, that wasn't the only fear/joy moment in our lives. There have been many. And I'm sure that you could share your own picture or describe a situation in your life. Whether it's a new school or education path, a new job or career change, a wedding day, an adoption, a new business venture, or your retirement, important moments mingle both fear and joy.

We find the same thing in the Bible. Here are a few examples:

Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling (Ps. 2:10-11).

But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you." So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples (Matt. 28:5-8).

Fear and joy are a part of these consequential moments. Last week, through 2 Samuel 4-5, we noted how God-centeredness is essential for living in a complex world. This week, through 2 Samuel 6, we see that God-centeredness creates fear and joy.

God-centered living embraces the fear of the Lord and the joy of the Lord.

Our text today is about the return of the ark of the covenant to the central place in the nation of Israel. It's amazing, disturbing, and instructive. It's a text with lessons about respect for the glory of God, and it's a passage that highlights unashamed celebration.

2 Samuel 6 shows us the beautiful combination of fear and joy when God is at the center.

Fear of the Lord (v. 9)

Once David had been established as king and the entire nation had acknowledged his rule, David seeks the return of the ark of the covenant. You may remember that the ark was central to the spiritual life and identity of the people of Israel. It was a chest just over two feet wide, two feet tall, and about four feet long. The ark was overlaid with gold, and its cover featured two cherubim, or angels, with wings spread toward one another.

In the tabernacle, the ark was placed inside the Holy of Holies. Once a year and on the day of atonement, the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies and sprinkle blood on the cover or what was called the mercy seat. This was the means of atoning for the sins of the people of God. The ark was where God met with his people. That's why it was so important.

After the Exodus, the ark and tabernacle were set in the middle of the camp. It expressed the God-centeredness of the people of Israel. The ark represented the rule, reconciliation, and revelation of God.¹

You may also remember that 1 Samuel 4 records how the people of Israel tried to use the ark as a “good luck charm” in defeating the Philistines, only to have it captured and taken away from them. When it was returned to Israel during the reign of Saul, the ark was stored at the house of Abinadab:

From the day that the ark was lodged at Kiriath-jearim, a long time passed, some twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD (1 Sam. 7:2).

I share all of this so that you know that the ark and its return is critical for the life and identity of Israel. The placement of the ark in the new capital city of Israel meant that while a king was seated on the throne, the real ruler of the people was God himself. The ark in its rightful place meant that God was in his prioritized place. This is a big deal.

So, when 2 Samuel 6:1-2 begins, we must understand the weightiness of this moment. David takes 30,000 soldiers with him. Why such a huge force? It’s probably more symbolic than anything else because when the ark was lost to the Philistines in 1 Samuel 4, 30,000 men died. What’s more, a parallel text in 1 Chronicles 13 tells us that priests and Levites were also involved.

The city, Baale-Judah, is just another name for Kiriath-Jerim where the ark has remained. Take note of how the ark is described in verse 2: “the ark of God, which is called by the name of the LORD of hosts who sits enthroned on the cherubim . . .” It’s another example of how important the ark of the Lord is to the people of God.

This was supposed to be a big, triumphant day. Thirty thousand men. Levites and priests. They were bringing the ark—the presence of God—to the city of Jerusalem. You can imagine the excitement and enthusiasm.

According to verse 3, they retrieve the ark from the house of Abinadab. The ark has been “in storage” for twenty years, and the family of Abinadab has been caring for it. In 1 Samuel 7, Abinadab’s son (Eleazar) was consecrated for this task. And we find that the sons of Abinadab or a brother of his (see the note in the ESV) drove a cart on which the ark was placed.

Transporting the cart this way had historical precedent because the Philistines sent the ark back to the Israelites in this manner (1 Samuel 6). But with no shortage of priests, the proper way to transport the ark was by using poles through loops on the sides of the ark. Exodus 25 provided very specific instructions, and Numbers 4 was clear that the holy things should not be touched.

¹ Dale Ralph Davis, [2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity](#), Focus on the Bible Commentary (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 74.

According to verse 5, it was quite a procession. The people were celebrating before the Lord. There were “songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.” But it all changed in an instant.

When the oxen approached the threshing floor of Nacon, they stumbled (v. 6). Apparently, the ark started to slip off the cart and fall. That’s when Uzzah put out his hand and took hold of it. The result is recorded in verse 7:

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 (2 Sam. 6:7).

I would imagine that the music suddenly stopped as people realized what happened. According to verse 8, David was angry. Now, we’re not told why. Perhaps he was angry that proper attention had not been paid to the specific commandments regarding the handling of the ark. Is he simply angry at the circumstances? Is he angry at God? We’re not sure.

But we do get a sense of what was happening inside of him because the text tells us that David was afraid of the Lord that day (v. 9). He even said, “How can the ark of the Lord come to me?” It’s noteworthy that David didn’t inquire of the Lord regarding the decision to retrieve the ark. Was he overconfident? It’s clear that the people were treating the holiness of God with a degree of casualness. Were they sloppy? With the sense of celebration and nationalistic fervor as the tribes are all united, were they idolatrous? Surely some priest knew that the ark wasn’t supposed to be on a cart—even a new one. Were they filled with the fear of man?

We don’t know. But what we do know is that Uzzah is dead, and it surely sent a shockwave through the nation. There’s a lesson here about the holiness of God and the appropriate fear of him. Walter Brueggemann says, “When people are no longer awed, respectful, or fearful of God’s holiness, the community is put at risk.”²

David decides to store the ark once again. But this time he entrusts it to a man named Obed-Edom (“servant of Edom”). He’s not Jewish, and yet convenience probably dictates this action on David’s part.

Do you see how the fear of the Lord is central to this text? The death of Uzzah cuts against our own sense of fairness, doesn’t it? A modern reader might say, “Good grief! All he did was put out his hand to stop the destruction of the ark.” But that would be to assume that we appropriately understand and properly weigh the holiness of God. This is not just a piece of furniture from the tabernacle. This is what mediated the presence of God in the Old Testament.

² V. Philips Long, [*1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), ed. David G. Firth, vol. 8, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2020), 325.

God-centeredness means that you know that God is a big deal! He's holy, sovereign, righteous, and eternal. He's God. Dale Davis says, "You dare not trifle with a God who is both real and holy. Yahweh is not your neat, warm, fuzzy friend in the sky."³

Joy of the Lord (v. 12)

The story continues. After three months, David learns that the Lord had blessed the house of Obed-Edom while he stored the ark. He decides to give the transportation of the ark a second try. And he brought it to Jerusalem "with great rejoicing" (v. 12).

Verse 13 is particularly important. This time there is no cart. The ark is being properly carried, and when they advance six steps, everyone stops. David offered sacrifices. It seems they've learned their lesson. They are doing this the right way.

David is full of joy (v. 14). He's "all in" in his rejoicing, dancing before the Lord. What's more, he removes his kingly vestments and puts on a linen ephod. This is priestly attire, and it harkens back to the linen ephods that Hannah made for her annual trip to visit Samuel in 1 Samuel 2. David, as king, is leading the people in worship and celebration. The entire nation joins him:

So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting and with the sound of the horn (2 Sam. 6:15).

However, a conflict emerges with Michal who watches David in his celebration. Michal is the daughter of Saul who was given to David in marriage and then given to another man. David brought her back after the death of Saul. Take note that she's not involved in the celebration and that "she despised him in her heart" (v. 16).

David, according to verse 17, brings the ark into Jerusalem. He set it in a tent that he made for it, and he offered sacrifices. The return of the ark was complete. What a day! The entire nation celebrated. David blessed the people (v. 18), and he provided a gift to everyone: "a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins." Everyone went home, including David. It must have been a great day.

But Michal is severely critical of David. It's remarkable how joyful moments can be either misunderstood or not appreciated. Michal speaks out of her bitterness and perhaps her grief. She meets David with a noticeable level of biting sarcasm:

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!" (2 Sam. 6:20).

³ Dale Ralph Davis, [*2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*](#), Focus on the Bible Commentary (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 76.

She charges David with being undignified. But the king doubles down on his joy. He will not allow the bitterness of Michal to take him off course:

And David said to Michal, "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" (2 Sam. 6:21-22).

David isn't going to tamp down his joy in the Lord. His celebration was not Michal-centered; it was God-centered. There's no retort by Michal, but there is by the narrator. Our text ends with this: "And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death" (2 Sam. 6:23). We're left wondering if she couldn't conceive or if her relationship with David changed for the rest of her life.

God-centered living embraces the fear of the Lord and the joy of the Lord.

So, when it comes to your relationship with the Lord, how's the balance of fear and joy?

Paul Tripp says, "The fear of the LORD is such a reverential awe of God that grips your heart that you're willing to listen to His wisdom, you're willing to submit to His commands, you're willing to surrender your will to His will, and you're willing to rest in the awesome promises of His grace. The fear of the LORD makes you run toward Him, not away from Him and causes you to live in a way you would not live apart from Him."⁴

Consequential moments usually involve both fear and joy. And what could be more consequential and important than our relationship with the one, true God? This perspective becomes the means of joyful endurance.

Dale Davis says, "The evangelical church easily loses sight of this. We can always dredge up more adrenaline because of the latest moral or ethical or social or cultural or political emergency. Crises may stimulate us to action but they do not sustain life. The church must never look to the latest cause for her life. We cannot ignore the enemies outside the city of God, but we must not be absorbed by them. War must not efface worship. The real question is not 'Who is against us?' but 'Who is among us?'"⁵

God-centered living embraces the fear of God and the joy of the Lord.

⁴ https://www.paultripp.com/proverbs/posts/011-fearless-fear?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjwrKu2BhDkARIsAD7GBouYyUjhi3Ux8Zd_6QkeHdgBZzmhIFGpoFI02B9VWqH_gMYuqVMBSA8aAuwsEALw_wcB

⁵ Dale Ralph Davis, [*2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*](#), Focus on the Bible Commentary (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 74.

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