

**FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH**  
9244 Five Forks Road  
Waynesboro, PA 17268-9612                      Tel: (717) 762-2991

**SCRIPTURE:** *II Samuel 6:1-19*

**DATE:** *August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020*

**LOCATION:** *Auditorium (Bill)*

**SERMON:** *The Ark of the LORD*

---

*(Acknowledgement to Tim Keller for various sermons on the life of David.)*

Good morning Five Forks Church, glad to be with those of you who have come out this morning, and glad to be joined by those who you who are tuning in to the live stream.

Have you ever been in the middle of a conversation with someone and things were going fine, you said something with nothing but the best of intentions and the person you were talking to took it wrong, and just snapped? You're left wondering, *"What in the world just happened there?"*

One of the more disturbing events that we read about in the Bible occurred one day when the ark of God was being transported on a cart to the city of Jerusalem. At one point along the way, the oxen pulling the cart stumbled, and one of the men walking alongside reached out and steadied the ark so it didn't slide off. *"Hey, good job, way to go"*, right? Well, the Lord's anger burned against this man, and He struck him dead. And we say, *"What in the world just happened there?"*

The Sermon Series that we're in is called **Make or Break**...we're looking at a number of things that can make us or break us as we look to follow Jesus. This morning's topic is big one...it's **The Presence of God**. It's something that as followers of Jesus we should all desire, but it should never, ever be taken lightly.

As we make our way through this series, we've been looking at a number of events that unfold in the life of David. Go ahead and open up your Bible, get out your device, or follow along on the screen as we head to **II Samuel chapter 6** where David's story continues.

As you make your way there, remember that every week we're asking the same three questions: First, **What's Happening?**...Second, **What's Noteworthy?** Third, **What's Your Next Step?**

So let's see...

## **1. WHAT'S HAPPENING?**

This whole passage revolves around **The Ark of the Covenant**. The word "ark" simply means "chest" and so this ark is a wooden chest about 4 feet long and 2 ½ feet high and wide.

It was layered in gold, with two cherubim (angels) on the top of the ark facing each other. Inside the ark were a number of items, most notably, the stone tablets containing the 10 Commandments. And above the ark would appear the glory, the brilliance, the presence of God.

It was the main piece of furniture in **the Tabernacle**, which from the time of Moses was the place where the Israelites would worship.

Upon entering the tabernacle you would first go through a courtyard, and then into a tented area called **The Holy Place**. There was a curtain inside this tent, and on the other side of the curtain was **The Most Holy Place**...this is where the ark was located. Once a year, and only once a year, the High Priest and only the High Priest would enter The Most Holy Place and sprinkle blood in order to atone for his sins and the sins of the people.

From the time of Moses, wherever the Israelites went, the ark – and thus the visible presence of God - went with them, and once the Israelites entered into the Promised Land, the ark was placed and remained in a town called **Shiloh**.

Hundreds of years pass, and one day, there a battle takes place between the Israelites and Philistines, and the Israelites take a beating, losing 4,000 men. The elders of Israel asked, *“How could this happen?...when someone spoke up and said, “Let’s do this...”*

**I Samuel 4:3b Let us bring the ark of the LORD’s covenant from Shiloh, so that it may go before us and save us from the hand of our enemies.”**

Now what has been suggested is unthinkable, you can’t just go waltzing into the Tabernacle and grab the ark. Only the High Priest can enter into The Most Holy Place, and then only once a year.

But this fact didn’t stop them, a group of men went and got the ark...and when they went into battle with the Philistines, they got slaughtered...with 30,000 Israelites losing their lives...and the ark was captured by the Philistines.

Well, the Philistines had it for seven months, and it was a complete disaster for them...whoever possessed the ark would experience plagues and tumors, so it was passed from town to town. After seven months the Philistines say, *“Let’s get rid of this thing!”* They put it on an ox cart without a driver and just sent it towards Israel.

The cart with the ark enters Israel, coming to rest in a town called Beth Shemesh, and the people of the town rejoiced, saying, *“Oh, look! The ark!”* And so they open the top and look inside and 70 men die.

And so...

**I Samuel 6:1b They took it to Abinidab’s house on the hill...”**

...and there it sat, in this remote, out of the way place for the next 20 years. Over 300 years in Shiloh. 7 months with the Philistines. 20 years on the hill.

During this 20 year period, while the ark sat in Abinidab’s house, a number of important things happen. Saul became king, but eventually lost the throne and his life. David was anointed by

Samuel, killed Goliath, eventually becoming king over all Israel. As king, he conquered the city of Jerusalem, and made it his capital.

And now David intends to go to Abinidab's house, retrieve the ark, and bring it to Jerusalem.

II Samuel 6, picking up with verse 2. David has chosen and brought together 30,000 men, and together they set out to bring to Jerusalem...

**II Samuel 6:2b-9 ...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. They set the ark of God on a new cart and brought it from the house of Abinidab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinidab, were guiding the new cart with the ark of God on it, and Ahio was walking in front of it. 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.**

**When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. 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.**

**Then David was angry because the LORD's wrath had broken out against Uzzah, and to this day that place is called Perez Uzzah. (Which means "outbreak against Uzzah")**

**David was afraid of the LORD that day and said, "How can the ark of the LORD ever come to me?"**

All these emotions that come over David. Anger, because of what the Lord has done. Fear, because of what the Lord has done. And you can almost feel the hopelessness, the anguish as he cries out this question, right?

What began as a great celebration, suddenly and without warning turned into tragedy. At this point, he has lost any hope of being able to bring the ark with him back to Jerusalem.

And so the ark was taken to the house of a man named Obed-Edom, and the Scriptures tell us that over the next 3 months the Lord blessed Obed-Edom and his entire household.

When David was told how the LORD had blessed this man and his family, he rejoiced, and decided he would try again. He went to Obed-Edom's house, and...

**II Samuel 6:13 “When those who were carrying the ark of the LORD had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf.**

They continued on their way, with shouts and dancing and the sound of trumpets. They entered Jerusalem...placed it in a tent that David had prepared...as he continued to sacrifice offerings to the Lord.

Our first question this morning was “*What’s Happening?*”...and as we have seen, an awful lot. Quite a bit of background leading up to David’s efforts to bring the ark – and thus God’s presence - to the capital city of Jerusalem.

Let’s move on then, to our second question:

## **2. WHAT’S NOTEWORTHY?**

While we looked at a lot of the background leading up to our Scripture passage, what is it here in II Samuel 6 that stands out to you?

How about if we start with...

### **A. David’s Desire for the Ark**

When David cried out “**How can the ark of the Lord ever come to me?**”...what he was really saying is “**How can the presence of the Lord ever come to me?**”

You see, David was fully aware that while God is everywhere, David was also aware that hundreds of years earlier God’s presence became personal to His people as His glory hovered over the ark of the covenant. He wanted this, and as we read the Scriptures it seems as if God’s presence was something very personal to him.

David wrote these words now found in Psalm 27...

**Psalm 27:4 One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.**

Throughout the Psalms you see David expressing his desire to experience the personal presence of God.

You see, what David is looking for is clearly more than just belief in God...he wants to experience Him personally...His beauty, His presence. Maybe because David was aware of the huge responsibility of being the king of this nation. The demands, the expectations, the oppositions, the victories and the failures? He knew he needed more than a concept of God's presence...he was longing for the real thing...God's personal presence.

But it doesn't just happen, as we see by looking at the second thing that stands out in this passage, and that is,...

## **B. The Problem of the Ark**

Think about all that's been happening...plagues and tumors breaking out on the people of the towns that possessed the ark....70 men who died peering into the ark. It got to the point where just about everybody wanted nothing to do with it.

Everybody except David. David was aware of the ark's origins and how God's glory, brilliance and presence hovers over it, and so he wants that with him in Jerusalem.

So what did we see? He and 30,000 men and who knows how many others go to Abinidab's house in the hill, and place the ark on an ox cart. And we read how Abinidab's sons, Uzzah and Ahio assume responsibility for guiding the cart on what will be a 30 mile journey. All along the way there is just great celebrating amongst tens of thousands of people who get to be a part of this incredible event....playing instruments, singing and dancing.

They are closing in on Jerusalem, just about 3 more miles to go, when all of the sudden...

**II Samuel 6:6b-7a Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. The Lord's anger burned against Uzzah...**

And God struck him dead.

And everything and everybody just stopped. Maybe a scream or two, but I'll bet it got pretty quiet in a hurry.

During his most recent sermon series called **What's In a Name?**, Pastor Shaun had us looking at ***"The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and..."***

Wait. What? Slow to anger? Really? It looks like God just snapped. We say, *"Come on God, he was only trying to help."*

But as is usually the case, there is always more to the story. Earlier in the Scriptures - and David would have known this - God had given three specific rules on how the Ark should be transported.

- 1. Had to be covered**
- 2. Had to be carried**
- 3. Couldn't be touched**

I assume it wasn't covered based on how casually the Israelites viewed other two rules.

**Had to be carried (Picture)** There were golden rings on the side of the ark and you would put poles through these rings and then four men *who had to be Levites* would carry it on their shoulders. Ox carts are for carrying stuff...offerings, equipment, even grain. And Israel was treating the ark – which not only carried the 10 Commandments but represented the presence of God – they treated the ark as if it were just stuff.

And of course, **it couldn't be touched**. Which it was, with tragic results.

Thing is, this wasn't the first time it was touched. How did they bring it back from Shiloh, how did they get it on the cart? Either way, it clearly wasn't carried. So I can't sit up here and tell you why God dealt with the disobedience of the Israelites at that particular time and at that particular place and in that particular way...but this much is clear:

We have more than **30,000 Israelites treating the ark of God casually... and seeing the commands of God as optional.**

Treating God's *presence* casually. And seeing His commands as optional. Somehow, over time, David and the Israelites lost sight of the holy nature of God, and while they were desiring His presence, they were taking it lightly. And they weren't taking His commands seriously.

And so here is Uzzah lying dead along the road, and it appears that David's hope of bringing the ark to Jerusalem dies with him. It seems as if David is beginning to sense the fact that there is this huge chasm that exists between himself and God. There may be a bit of an awakening...a growing awareness of God's holiness and his sinfulness.

It's seen in David's cry of anguish: ***"How can the ark of the Lord – the presence of the Lord - ever come to me?"***

Which brings us to the third thing that is noteworthy in this passage...

### **C. The Answer to David's Question**

As Uzzah lies dead there on the side of the road, David is feeling that the presence of God that he desperately longs for will always remain beyond his reach.

What David is feeling is actually not a bad first step as it helps David to understand the holy nature of God, and the fact that he has been treating God's presence so casually. It helps him to see the broken relationship that exists between himself and God. This awareness isn't enough to fix the relationship, but it gets things moving in the right direction.

After David's cry of anguish, they take the ark and place it in the home of a man called Obed-Edom.

And then everybody went home.

Now Obed-Edom was a Gittite, which means he's a foreigner – he's not an Israelite - living in the suburbs of Jerusalem. And when they took the ark to his place, probably everybody was thinking that this guy is toast. Except he wasn't. We read...

**II Samuel 6:11 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.**

And David gets wind of this, and his hope is renewed...*"Maybe it is possible for the presence of the Lord to come to me."*

And so David goes to Obed-Edom's house and tries again, this time, with a different approach....

**II Samuel 6:13 When those who were carrying the ark of the LORD had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf.**

Notice this time they are carrying the ark. But even that's not enough to bridge the chasm...all David is doing at this point is following the rules, and following the rules isn't enough to fix the broken relationship that exists between himself and God.

And so what else do we see here? Six steps, and then what? A sacrifice. Seeking atonement for sins that he and the Israelites had committed.

Not sure how often they would do this, but eventually...

**II Samuel 6:17 They brought the ark of the LORD and set it in its place inside the tent that David had pitched for it, and David sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before the LORD.**

*Another sacrifice* as the ark is placed inside the tent where it will reside. David understood that because of his sin, a price had to be paid, and so a bull, a calf gave it's life...it's blood was shed...and by doing so covered David's sin, and his relationship with God was restored. And his desire for the presence of the Lord to come to him would be fulfilled.

Now, in light of whatever God has revealed to you...

### **3. WHAT'S YOUR NEXT STEP?**

How is God looking for you to respond to what we have read in this passage?

As always, let me just offer a few suggestions for your consideration. For one or more of you in here...or out there...maybe David's question should really be your question. In other words, you should **Ask "How can the presence of God ever come to me?"**

Like David, that's a good first step because it indicates that you're aware of the absence of God's presence in your life. You may have a concept of God, or even believe in God, but you have to admit that neither God Himself or His commands have ever really mattered to you.

And what that really means is that the relationship that God desires to have with you is broken at this time. But God is revealing to you through the Scriptures, that the shed blood of the bull and the calf that atoned for David's sin...points ahead to the coming of Jesus, whose blood would be shed to cover your sins and mine, and allow you to enter into a relationship so real that you will be able to experience His personal presence in your life.

Think about that for a minute. You – *You* – can begin to experience the presence of God Himself in your life, *if* you can come to trust that Jesus gave *His life for yours* when He died on the Cross.

If you can trust Him with that, and will choose to follow Him, please let me know as I would love to pray with you and for you as your new life begins.

For those of you who have already placed your trust in Jesus and are following Him, perhaps your next step is to **See if you are treating His commands as optional.**

We read this passage and when we come to the death of Uzzah and there's something about it that bothers us, right? But **the right response in this passage isn't "Look at how cruel God is!". The right response is to look in the mirror and see how casual we have become with His commands.**

I said earlier, Somehow, over time, David and the Israelites lost sight of the holy nature of God, ...I wonder if the same thing has happened to the church...desiring His presence, but taking it lightly...and not taking His commands seriously?

For instance, you could make the case that we are living in a time and place when even the church believes in a God that is casual about sexual sin, rather than the holy God we often sing about.

You could make the case that the church believes that God is casual about our attitude and treatment of others. As followers of Jesus, when interacting with others, face to face or on social media... whether they believe like us, look like us, act like us or not...God calls us to display compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience in our words and actions. These are not casual instructions. These are not optional. But we treat them as if they are.

Earlier I mentioned the "What's In a Name" sermon series that Pastor Shaun recently did, and one week he showed us that **"Far Side Cartoon"** with a man walking down the street and God getting ready to push the "smite" button and have a piano fall on him. We chuckled because we know that this is not how God is...not looking to – on a whim – bring tragedy upon us. He *is* slow to anger. But if there is anything we want to take from this passage before it is too late...His presence is not be treated casually and His commands are not to be seen as optional.

As I said before, I can't tell you why God dealt with the disobedience of the Israelites at that particular time and at that particular place and in that particular way...all I know is that He did.

And it would be foolish for me to think that just because He is slow to anger, that He never gets angry when we don't take Him seriously. He will look to wake us up, just as He needed to wake David up...not to punish us, but to get that burden that sin brings into our lives off of our backs...and help us to rediscover the fresh air of freedom that comes when we're walking with Jesus.

As I've said before in this series, one thing that we do as followers of Jesus is invite God's Spirit to bring to light those things in our hearts and lives that need to be addressed. Ask God to point out to you any commands you have been seeing as optional, and be thankful that in His mercy, He has revealed this to you now, so you can confess your sin, turn from it, and begin to live once again without all the burden that sin brings into our lives.

Finally, for some of you who have already made the decision to follow Jesus, your next step is to – like David - **Desire to know God in a very personal way.**

I talked earlier about how David was desiring the presence of God because of all the demands placed upon his life. Think of all the demands placed upon you at this time in your life.

Aren't you dealing with other people's expectations of you? As an spouse? Or mother, father, son, daughter...as an employee? Isn't there opposition and obstacles in your life, whether it come from people or circumstances? You need more than just a concept of God's presence...you need the real thing.

Besides the expectations we all face, I think another reason why you should desire His personal presence is to hear what He wants to say to you in the quietness of the day.

In the morning when I get up the first thing I do before eating breakfast and coming in to the church is just take a 20-30 minute walk and talk with God, back through the neighborhood where I live. As I experience His personal presence, there are times when I do the talking and there are times when I just listen and give Him a chance to talk. A couple of weeks ago it was during a time when I was the one doing the talking, that these two words just came very strong out of nowhere: *"Dearly Loved."*

It was totally unexpected, but I couldn't deny that these two words had just come upon me in a way I couldn't deny or explain away. I know I was in the midst of doing the talking, but if He wants to interrupt, the floor's all His.

I'll be honest, sometimes I don't feel as if I'm worthy of being seen as dearly loved by Jesus. But I sure am glad that He lets me know that I am.

It will be difficult to experience His personal presence and the words that He might want to convey to you – the fact that you are dearly loved (and you are) – if you are not giving Him a chance to say so. Who knows what you may be missing out on? And so don't be content to know in your head that God loves you...give Him an opportunity to tell you so by seeking His presence in a time and place that is just for the two of you.

David was longing for the presence of the Lord. But he went about it all wrong. Once he caught sight of the holy nature of God and caught sight of his own sin, it paved the way for him to discover a path to God and His personal presence in his life.

If you have trusted Jesus as your Savior and follow Him as the Lord of your life, there is nothing keeping you from experiencing His personal presence in your life. Think about that...the personal presence of the maker of heaven and earth. It almost boggles the mind...until we experience for ourselves His love, His beauty, His leading.

May you be experiencing His presence in your life right now, as together, we come before Him. Would you join me as I pray?

## **PRAYER**

## **BENEDICTION**

**Colossians 3:12-14 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and *dearly loved*, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.**