

The Nobody And The King

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[0:00] Well, I'd like us to turn back together tonight to 2 Samuel 6. Let me read verses 5 to 9 again. 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? We've recently been doing a series called Taking Sin Seriously.

In that series, we've been thinking about how crucial it is to realize that sin's not a minor problem. Sin's not just being a little bit naughty. And sin is most definitely not a plaything. Sin is poison. It's lethal. It's merciless. And we have got to take sin seriously. But when we see how serious sin is, that's when we see how beautiful and how important the gospel is. Because Jesus has come to forgive the guilt of sin. Jesus has come to free us from the power of sin. And Jesus has come to heal us from all the bruises and scars of sin.

[1:39] Now, I said a couple of weeks ago, and some of you might remember this, I said a couple of weeks ago that my sermon a fortnight ago was going to be the last in this series. But I've changed my mind.

For a long time, I could never finish a sermon on time. Now it seems I can't finish a sermon series on time either. I want to do this one more sermon in this series.

Because I want to look at this passage in 2 Samuel, let alone preach on. But this passage has been on my mind for a few weeks because I heard it preached on at the Harris Study Conference in February.

In the minister there was Paul Levy. Some of you were there, I think. And he preached a brilliant message on this passage as part of a series on the fear of the Lord. And his message was superb, emphasizing that when we come before the Lord, we are to serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling, which is the words that we used as our call to worship.

And so his emphasis was on the fear of the Lord. And it's well worth listening to. But Paul Levy's sermon helped me to think about this passage in a way that I'd never really thought of it before.

[2:54] And that's what I want to try and show you tonight. This is one of the hardest passages in the Bible. It's a stark reminder of the holiness of God and of the seriousness of sin.

A man just touches the ark and he dies instantly. And so it shows how serious sin is. But I think that this is also a passage that shows us the breathtaking wonder and beauty of the gospel.

And that's what I hope that we're going to see tonight. And we're going to look at it under the title, The Nobody and the King. Now, I've got two sermon headings this evening, but I'm not going to tell you what they are yet.

First of all, to understand this passage, there's three characters that we need to think about. There's Uzzah, there's David, and there's the ark.

Uzzah is a nobody. So there's nothing particularly important about him. There's no indication of any status or prominence.

[4:05] We know that he's a son of Abinadab. We've been told that. But that's pretty much all we know. He's not particularly good. He's not particularly bad. He's just a guy. He's a nobody.

David is the king. And this chapter is much more about David than it is about Uzzah.

In fact, the whole of 1 and 2 Samuel is actually about David. He's always the one that the book is pointing towards. And so everything in this chapter is actually contributing to our understanding of David.

Because David is one of the most important figures in the Old Testament. David is the king. David was God's chosen king. He was the shepherd boy who went on to become the shepherd king of the nation.

And God did wonderful things through David. He enabled the nation to accomplish stunning victories over their enemies. God blessed David with astonishing privileges and promises.

[5:09] And God actually sets David up as the model king against which all the other kings are compared. So if you read through the rest of 2 Samuel and go into 1 and 2 Kings, and you read about the rest of the kings, they're always compared with David.

Good ones are like David. And the evil ones are not. But as I'm sure many of you will also know, and as again we'll see tonight, David was not faultless.

He was far from perfect. And he made many serious mistakes. And then there's the ark. The ark was massively important in Old Testament Israel.

So if David as king is the most important person in the nation, the ark is the most important object. It was made after the Israelites came out of...

Taking us right back to the Exodus, that's when it was made. It was made after the Israelites came out of Egypt. It contained the two stone tablets that had the Ten Commandments written upon them.

[6:11] On top of the ark was a covering called the mercy seat. At either end, there was gold cherubim facing each other with wings stretched out over the top of it, probably in a posture of guarding this precious item.

And the ark spoke very powerfully to the Israelites in a number of ways. It spoke of God's presence. It was above the ark that God would meet with Moses.

You see that there. He says, put the mercy seat on top. You put the testimony that I give you. That's the Ten Commandments. There I will meet with you. So it's speaking about God's presence.

It also speaks of God's authority. David himself, 2 Samuel 6, itself captures this. The chapter that we read. It speaks about the ark of God, which is called by the name of the Lord of hosts, who sits enthroned on the cherubim.

And that language of being enthroned is the language of being a king. In Chronicles 28, David speaks of the ark as a footstool of our God.

[7:23] And that, again, is the language of a king of authority. The king has his throne, and he has a footstool for his feet. That was part of what the ark symbolized.

So it spoke of God's presence. It spoke of his authority. And it also spoke of God's mercy. The ark contained the law that the people repeatedly broke.

But the ark was also a key part of the Old Testament tabernacle and sacrificial system to be gracious and to provide a way of forgiveness and salvation for these people who had sinned.

So the ark is incredibly important. And as you maybe know, everything in the Old Testament to do with the ark, the tabernacle, the sacrificial system, everything had to be handled with the greatest of care.

One thing that is abundantly clear in the Old Testament is that anything that involves God's presence cannot be treated casually.

[8:31] And so whether it's when God meets with Moses at the top of Sinai, or whether it's when his presence comes to dwell in the tabernacle, or later in the temple, whenever, or even the burning bush that Gordon mentioned this morning, anything that involves coming into God's presence in the Old Testament, you cannot do that casually.

God is holy, and sinners approaching God have to do so with extreme care. God is absolutely not to be messed around with.

The Old Testament makes that abundantly clear, and as part of that, the ark was to be handled with the utmost care. Now, all of that's so important for us to have in our minds if we're going to understand the passage we've read in 2 Samuel 6.

Way back in Exodus, very specific instructions had been given about how the ark was going to be transported. And I'll just run through these. First of all, poles were made for carrying it.

So these were to be fed through loops, and poles were used to lift it. A particular clan of Levites, the Kohathites, were set aside to be the one.

[9:50] And so in terms of transportation, they had to carry it on their shoulders. And so in terms of transportation, in number seven, there's lots of wagons and oxen given to various clans for carrying various items related to the tabernacle.

But no cart, no wagon, is given to the Kohathites because they were charged with the service of the holy things that had to be carried on the shoulder.

So poles, shoulders, and only the Kohathites. A covering had to be placed over it. You can see that in Numbers 4. If they're going to move it, covering a goatskin, spread it over the top of the ark if you're going to move it.

And as they did that, and I'm not going to read the whole of that passage, but Numbers 4 basically says that as you're carrying it, it says you must not touch the holy things lest they die.

And it even says that they must not even look at them lest they die. So you've got to handle it with absolute care.

[10:58] So way back at the Exodus, here's the instructions. Use poles. The Kohathites have to carry it. It's got to be on their shoulders. It has to be covered. And you don't look at it and you absolutely don't touch it.

Now, with all of that in our minds, when we go back to 2 Samuel 6, which we read, we realize straight away that everything is wrong. So there's a cart.

So David, they've carried the Ark of God on a new cart. There's not supposed to be a cart. It's supposed to be on poles.

And there's oxen pulling it. And again, that's not supposed to be the case. There we go. The oxen's mentioned there. There's oxen pulling the cart.

There's not meant to be any oxen. It's meant to be on their shoulders. There's no mention of a cover. And I don't know this for certain, but it may even have been the case that had the covering been there, perhaps if it had been touched, the consequences which took place may not have happened.

[12:09] And all we know about Uzzah and Ohio, these two men who are overseeing the transportation, all we know is that they're the sons of Abinadab.

Now, I don't know this for sure. So this isn't, I'm not saying this for definite because I don't know for sure. But I think we're being told there that they weren't Kohathites.

They're not part of the tribe. They're not part of the clan of the Levites that have been appointed to carry. In other words, everything is being done in the wrong way.

In fact, it's even worse than that because way back in 1 Samuel, the Philistines had captured the ark.

So the Philistines and the Israelites were at war in early Samuel and at one point the Philistines captured the ark, they took the ark back to their land, they'd set it in their temple and it had caused all sorts of severe plagues upon them.

[13:10] And so they realized quite quickly we need to get rid of this ark. And so in 2 Samuel 6 and what's on the screen there we read that the Philistines took a new cart and some cows, they set the ark on the cart and they basically said right, let's see what happens and they set it on their way and sure enough it went by itself but obviously not by itself with the guidance of God back towards the Israelites.

so they when they captured the ark they realized it was pulled back to the Israelites. Why is that important? It's telling us that when David and the Israelites in 2 Samuel 6 when they come and put the ark on a cart they are transporting it the Philistine way.

In other words they're just copying what the rest of the world is doing. instead of following God's instructions they're just doing it the Philistine way. And all of that I think well certainly for me all of that just transforms my understanding of this passage because when you read it first of all you think well it all sounds straightforward they've got a cart it's a new cart that sounds quite good they've got oxen they've got all these people these guys are driving it it all sounds so innocent but all of it is

completely ignoring and disregarding God's commandments they are doing it all wrong. And I think all of that's confirmed if you compare verse 3 and verse 13 so verse 3 first time round they come they stick it on a cart everything goes wrong three months later when David returns to the task you see that it's not on a cart. now it's being carried. Verse 13 they bore the ark and here instead of oxen pulling the cart oxen are being sacrificed even after six steps.

[15:16] And so it's very different the way they're carrying it in the second half of the chapter because in the first part they're doing everything wrong. And what I want to suggest to you is that the key point in all of this is that it's David's fault.

It's David's fault because he's the king. He is in charge. He's the one who's gathered these 30,000 people to go down to bring the ark up.

He's the one who's organizing this. He's the one who's responsible and he absolutely should have known better. the fact that they're carrying it in the wrong way is David's fault.

And the fact that Uzzah died is David's fault. And I think that that's confirmed by verses 8 and 9. It says David was angry because the Lord had broken out against Uzzah and the place is called Perez Uzzah to this day and David was afraid of the Lord that day and said how can the ark of the Lord come to me?

[16:26] I think these verses tell us two things. I think they tell us that David knows it's not Uzzah's fault. And that's why he's angry at God because he thinks this is unfair.

But I think at the same time I think David deep down knows that it's his fault. Because I want to suggest that David is displaying a pattern of behavior that we see again and again throughout history that we see all around us and that I've seen in my own heart as well that when we know that we've messed up we get afraid and we get angry and we want to blame someone else.

Often when we read this chapter if you've read it before our focus is on Uzzah and we see that he acted inappropriately he misjudged the holiness of God he took matters into his own hands he was irreverent and irresponsible.

And I think that that is possibly true to an extent but I don't think that that's the main focus of this chapter because I don't think the chapter is focusing on Uzzah at all. The chapter is focusing on David.

Uzzah was wrong to touch the ark but David had put him in an impossible position. Now some of you might be reading the passage if you've got it open before you or when we read it you might be thinking but what about verse 7 it says 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.

[17:56] Now that would make it say well Thomas it looks as though the blame really lies with Uzzah. Well in the Hebrew here it's just maybe important to note that the word his isn't actually there.

It's been added by the English translators literally it just says because of the error. And so it's not necessarily tying it to Uzzah here at all and I think the wider context in my view lays the blame much more on David.

And so yes Uzzah made a mistake but his error was always likely to happen because of a bigger error. David had set up everything in the wrong way and nobody is dying for the king.

That's the key point I want us to see that in this passage the king's made the mistake and a nobody dies for him. Uzzah is a nobody who is following instructions.

David is the king who's in charge of it all. David has got it wrong. Uzzah dies because of David's mistake then nobody dies for the king.

[19:23] Now at one level that's part of what makes this passage so shocking. It's shocking to read of God's judgment breaking out so suddenly and so violently on Uzzah. But then as we see the bigger story it becomes even more shocking because Uzzah's death is not so much an act of irreverence by a man who was trying to keep the cart and load steady it's actually arguably more an act of gross negligence by the king who was responsible for the welfare of Uzzah and for all his people.

Now again I'm going to say something that I think it's maybe the case so don't this is not something that you can take and say this is definitely the case I think it's maybe the case. I'm the thing I'm wondering is this I'm not persuaded that Uzzah was the first person to touch the ark because it had been captured by the Philistines we read that they put it onto an ark they put it in their temple they put it onto the cart they'd moved it about they'd grabbed it I'm pretty sure that they touched it so I think we can say it's very likely that they touch it and so it's not necessarily the case that the ark is like a kind of live electricity transformer that anyone who touches it is going to instantly die again I don't know that but I think that's a reasonable deduction from what we read about what you can read earlier in 1 Samuel that suggests to us that what happens here is actually unique and it's unique because it's exposing David's sin and that's telling us that if David had fulfilled his duty Uzzah would never have died but David the king fails and Uzzah the nobody dies now again all of that's shocking but what's most shocking of all is that exactly the same thing happens all around us all around us nobodies are dying for kings now we maybe don't use the word king as much anymore but the pattern is exactly the same around the globe the kings the rulers the leaders hate each other and political leaders see other nations as threats as an enemy and right now you can all see it and I can see it the kings have gone to war but it's the nobodies who are dying in our own nation how many people's lives are being ravaged by addiction the drugs that they take are worth billions same with alcohol same with gambling the kings are making a fortune the nobodies are dying for them international trade lower prices that desire to keep everything as cheap as possible means that there's workers all around the world even many of them who are children they're getting exploited the business kings are building their empires the nobodies are dying for them and even in more mainstream day to day life how many people are pouring their lives into impressing their boss gaining success having the right house the right salary the right reputation and how many people are slowly being ground down with exhaustion and fear and a crushing sense of failure and inadequacy the death might be a lot slower but as the kings of wealth and status and power and approval watch on the nobodies are slowly dying you read this passage and Uzzah's life feels like such a waste and yet there are millions more lives that are being just as wasted so in this passage and nobody dies for the king that's our first heading David's mistake leads to Uzzah's death but all of this is pointing us to more than just David's mistake remember we said David is one of the most important figures in the Old Testament and all the important people and events in the Old Testament are doing two things David's the same he's doing two things one he's a positive model of what God wants so more widely despite this mistake and other mistakes David was still Israel's greatest king and the rest of the chapter actually if you were to read the rest of it shows that he does come and do it right and he does it properly if you read the next chapter it's one of the most important chapters in the Old Testament 2nd Samuel 7 God comes to David with the most amazing covenant promise that God's true king is going to come through one of David's descendants so on the one hand David is a positive model of what God wants that's part of what the Old Testament does but the other thing that the Old Testament does and the other thing that's happening with David right now is that he's a shadow that's never good enough so yes there's positive glimpses signs pointing forwards but the Old Testament shadows are also deliberately never good enough and here in 2nd Samuel 6 the king makes a huge mistake and the nobody has to die for him but that's not how it's meant to be and that's not ultimately how it's going to be that's not how God's purposes are going to be worked out ultimately God's plan of salvation is not about a nobody dying for the king God's plan of salvation is about the king dying for the nobodies and this is where 2nd Samuel 6 is a glimpse of the gospel and the way it reveals that glimpse is that it shows you an inadequate shadow in fact it shows you the world's default the way the world does it the way David does it the way he gets it wrong which is simultaneously the opposite of the gospel this is showing you an inadequate shadow it's showing you the gospel's opposite in 2nd

[25:57] Samuel 6 the king makes a mistake the nobody pays the price in the gospel the opposite happens it's the nobodies like you and me who make the mistakes and it's the king who pays the price and really this chapter confirms that David despite his fame and honour and importance he's actually just a nobody like the rest of us he's a sinner and on his own he makes huge mistakes he needs a true king to save him he needs a true saviour to die for him and so do we and that's exactly what Jesus came to do Jesus is the ultimate king he's the true David he's the

Messiah he is God's anointed king he came as king he came as the king who was willing to die for the people remember we said in David you see a shepherd boy becoming the shepherd king well in Jesus you see the true shepherd king who becomes the lamb and who lays down his life for his sheep and that's why 2

Samuel 6 is simultaneously one of the most solemn and yet also one of the most beautiful chapters in the whole Old Testament it shows us that we've got to take sin seriously it shows us how serious sin is but it also points us to what Jesus has come to do for sinners like us Jesus came to die for the nobodies and the reason he did that is because the truth is nobody is a nobody to Jesus and in the gospel you see two incredible things you see that God takes sin seriously and he has to he is holy he's perfect he's righteous God takes sin seriously he has to but in the gospel you also see that God takes you even more seriously and he doesn't do that because he has to he does it because he chooses to he sent his son to die for you because he wants you in 2

Samuel 6 the nobody dies for the king in the gospel the king dies for the nobodies the king dies for you and if the breakout of judgment that we see in 2 Samuel 6 is is a glimpse of the severity of God's wrath against sin do you know what that actually is it's actually a glimpse of what was poured onto Jesus when he died in our place on the cross so how should we respond to that well the big mistake of David was to handle the ark the way the Philistines had handled it in other words he'd follow the culture around him and rather than listening to God he kind of thought yeah I'll do something to do with God but I'll do it my way and we do the same so easily we go to God we think yes I want a relationship with you but I kind of want it on my terms and I kind of want to be able to follow what everybody else is doing and sometimes that'll lead us to ignore God completely sometimes it'll lead us to think about

God a little bit sometimes it'll lead us to think well I do want God in my life but it has to be on my terms whenever we do that we're actually saying that God isn't king we're saying that something else is king we're making God fit in with what we want what we think is best and that's to relegate God rather than to exalt him and David's massive mistake was just to do things the way everyone was doing him please don't do that please don't do that instead the gospel is calling us to recognize two crucial things it's calling to recognize it's calling us to recognize that Jesus really is king Jesus really is king he's king over everything over all the chaos in the world just now all the rulers who think that they've got all endless power they are going to they they will be forgotten in the generations to come

Jesus is king and he reigns over all that's the first crucial thing the gospel is calling us to recognize Jesus really is king the second crucial thing that we have to recognize is that Jesus really did die for you he really did take every single one of your sins on his shoulders and he did that so that all your sins can be forgiven and so that you can be his forever that you can be healed that you can be restored that you can be saved Jesus really is king and Jesus really did die for you and that is telling you that the gospel is massively serious and stunningly beautiful in second samuel 6 and nobody dies for the king in the gospel the king dies for the nobodies and what does

[31:59] Jesus ask of us just that we would trust him and follow him worship him and love him