

Not a Safe God
2 Samuel 6:1-11
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June 30, 2019

In C.S. Lewis' "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe," the four children from England who are visiting Narnia meet a couple of talking animals, Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, who describe to them the great lion, Aslan.

Mrs. Beaver says, "If there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they are either braver than most or else just silly." The children then ask if Aslan is safe.

Mr. Beaver replies, "Safe? Who said anything about being safe? Of course he isn't safe, but he is good!"

Friends, in Narnia, Aslan represents Jesus Christ. So, in this story, Lewis is making the very important theological point that the Lord is not safe, but he is good.

Friends, in today's world, it seems a lot of folks would prefer a "safe God." Many people, both inside and outside the church, want to believe God is very quick to forgive us when we do "bad things," and is mostly concerned that we just "try to be a good person." We want to think God's primary goal is to help us "be happy" and enjoy "our best life now."

We would like to believe that God totally respects our freedom and pretty much lets us do our own thing, but when we are in any kind of trouble, we just need to push the buzzer. We call it "prayer," and God will immediately come to our aid.

Some scholars call this "moral, therapeutic deism," and suggest it is the religion many in our country embrace. This view of God is not really much different from the depiction in the "Oh, God!" movies forty years ago which had **George Burns portraying a grandfatherly deity who seemed very "safe."**

Now, I understand why people might prefer this type of God. Sometimes, I would probably prefer this type of God. Yet, as we will see this morning, this is not the type of God described in

the Bible. Thus, this is not the type of God who truly exists. Though we might prefer a "safe" God, the real God is not safe at all, but he is extremely good.

Our text this morning is 2 Samuel 6:1-11 (page 258). Let's pause and pray the Lord would enable us to grow in our understanding of and love for the God who is not safe, but is good.

This passage is about David's attempt to bring the Ark of the Covenant, a.k.a. the Ark of God or the Ark of the Lord, to his new capital in Jerusalem.

The classic movie, "Raiders of the Lost Ark," starring Harrison Ford, is the basis for many people's knowledge of the Ark. However, the Ark of the Covenant was, indeed, very real and very important to the people of Israel in Old Testament times.

It is also true that we don't know what happened to the Ark or whether it could possibly still exist somewhere. There is plenty of speculation surrounding those questions, but that is all it is.

The Ark was a wooden chest covered in gold – about 52 inches long, 31 inches high and 31 inches wide. It contained the two stone tablets with the Ten Commandments that Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai, his brother Aaron's rod, and a sample of manna, the food the Lord provided for Israel during their forty years in the Sinai Desert.

In one sense, it symbolized the Lord's presence among the people. In another, the Lord was actually more present inside the Ark than anywhere else.

2 Samuel 6:2 – The ark bears the Name, the name of the LORD of Armies who is enthroned between the cherubim.

The Ark had been in "Baale," a town also known as Kiriath-jearim. It is located in Judah, about ten miles south of Jerusalem. David assembled

an army of 30,000 men to escort the Ark, probably because he thought the Philistines, Israel's enemy, might find the Ark an inviting target to attack. The author describes what happened:

2 Samuel 6:3-5 – They set the ark of God on a new cart and transported it from Abinadab's, which was on the hill, (The Ark was taken there after being recaptured from the Philistines and had been there for many years.) and Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, were guiding the cart and brought it with the ark of God from Abinadab's house on the hill. Ahio walked in front of the ark. David and the whole house of Israel were dancing before the LORD with all kinds of fir wood, instruments, lyres, harps, tambourines, sistrums, and cymbals.

It is a huge celebration, but the mood changes very quickly.

2 Samuel 6:6 – When they came to Nacon's threshing floor, (we are not sure if this is a person or place) Uzzah reached out to the ark of God and took hold of it because the oxen had stumbled.

This seems like a very normal, almost instinctive reaction. It appeared the ark of the Lord might be slipping off the cart. Of course Uzzah would reach out and steady the Ark, right? Shouldn't he do whatever he can to keep it from falling into the dirt or mud? Apparently not!

2 Samuel 6:7 – Then the LORD's anger burned against Uzzah, and God struck him dead on the spot for his irreverence, and he died there next to the ark of God.

Wow! Let me read that again just in case you think you heard me wrong!

2 Samuel 6:7 – Then the LORD's anger burned against Uzzah, and God struck him dead on the spot for his irreverence, and he died there next to the ark of God.

“But, Pastor Dan, I don't get it. Why would God strike someone dead for trying to protect the Ark?”

Well, it is no surprise if we “don't get it,” because King David didn't either.

2 Samuel 6:8 – David was angry because of the LORD's outburst against Uzzah, so he named that place Outburst against Uzzah (Hebrew Perez-Uzzah) as it is today.

With whom is David angry? Probably not Uzzah. He is angry that his great celebration has been ruined, and it appears at least some of his anger is directed against the Lord.

However, there is more to this story; and David, as well as the rest of us who are familiar with the Old Testament, should have realized that.

Tim Chester writes in his commentary:

“Uzzah is not an innocent bystander. He is one of the men in charge of the operation (*verse 3*). And this operation is not being conducted in the right way. It is a disaster waiting to happen.”

And folks, disaster is what Uzzah gets! In the Old Testament, the religious workers in Israel are Levites, meaning part of Levi, one of the twelve tribes. Some Levites, the ones who were descendants of Aaron, Moses' brother, were the priests. Back in the book of Numbers, about 250 years earlier, the Lord gave another group of Levites, the Kohathites (*descendants of Levi's son Kohath*) the job of looking after the “holy things” including the Ark of the Covenant. But it was a dangerous job!

Numbers 4:20 – The Kohathites must not go in to look at the holy things, even for a moment, or they will die.

Before the Ark was ever moved, the priests – not the Kohathites – had to cover the Ark, first with a curtain and then a special leather case. Instead of being put on a cart, the Kohathites were to use poles and carry it on their shoulders. This was so they would never have to touch the Ark.

Was Uzzah aware of all these rules about how the Ark was to be handled? I am not sure, but he should have been. About forty years earlier, seventy men in the town of Beth-shemesh, just a few miles from Jerusalem, had instantly died when they looked inside the Ark. Certainly his father, Abimilech, had told him and his brother about that and had warned them to never touch or even look at the Ark of the Lord.

Yet, as preparations were made to move the Ark, God's instructions were pretty much ignored. It was a party-like atmosphere. And when Uzzah reached out and grabbed the Ark to steady it, he was probably not thinking about what a horrible act of irreverence it was. Yet, that is what his action was, and he pays the price.

We said earlier that David was angry about what happened to Uzzah. However, his anger quickly changes to a solemn decision.

2 Samuel 6:9 – David feared the LORD that day and said, “How can the ark of the LORD ever come to me?”

In the Bible, especially the Old Testament, “fearing the Lord” is a good thing. Here, however, it seems to mean that David was simply afraid. He realizes God and the Ark are simply not “safe.”

2 Samuel 6:10 – So he was not willing to bring the ark of the LORD to the city of David (meaning Jerusalem); instead, he diverted it to the house of Obed-edom of Gath.

This man may have been a Levite or part of David's royal guard, but he was likely considered a godly man.

2 Samuel 6:11 – The ark of the LORD remained in his house three months, and the LORD blessed Obed-edom and his whole family.

No, God is not safe, but he is good. Obed-edom apparently followed the rules, did not touch or look inside the Ark; and as a result, received wonderful blessings from the Lord.

Folks, the first time I became aware of this passage of the Bible was about forty years ago while listening to a cassette tape of R.C. Sproul talking about the holiness of God. I remember him saying, “How strange for Uzzah to grab the ark, trying to prevent it from falling in the dirt, thinking that dirt, a morally neutral substance, would somehow contaminate the Ark more than the touch of a sinful human being.”

When the hand of Uzzah, a sinner, just like every other human being, like every one of us, touched that Ark, it was a grave violation of God's holiness. We may not see it as such a big deal, but that is because we don't really understand God's holiness.

His holiness includes absolute moral purity, without even a trace of imperfection. It is like a blazing fire, consuming any and every imperfection.

Friends, ever since Adam and Eve disobeyed God and were expelled from the Garden, the question has been: **How can sinful human beings stand in the presence of a Holy God?**

The answer in the Old Testament was, “They must do so very carefully. **They must follow very specific instructions, making sure that God's holiness was not violated.**”

These things functioned much like protective gear against the fire of God's holiness. They enabled them to be in God's presence without being destroyed. Yet, as our text illustrates, if one became lax and careless about the protective gear, as Uzzah did, that person would be consumed by the fire of God's holiness.

In the New Testament, under the New Covenant, things are a bit different for us. Yes, we are all still sinners. Thus, we could never stand in the presence of the Holy God. Yet, rather than give us protective gear, religious rituals to perform, God gives us himself, in the person of Jesus Christ.

Those who trust in Jesus as their Savior, those who are Christians are credited with the righteousness of Christ and are indwelt by his

Spirit. In a sense, this changes our nature so we are no longer consumed by the fire of his holiness. The analogy is not that we have protective gear; but rather, it is as if we have become inflammable.

Yet, this is not something we have earned. The holiness of Jesus has been given or imputed to us. The book of Hebrews says Jesus has become our High Priest. That allows us to be in the presence of God without being consumed by the fire of his holiness.

Hebrews 4:16 – Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

So for Christians, for those trusting in the Lord Jesus, we are safe because of Jesus and the gracious salvation we have received. We will never be consumed by the fire of his holiness. Like Obed-edom, we experience his goodness as he dwells among us.

Yet, those who refuse to trust in the Lord Jesus don’t enjoy such safety. The Bible tells us the fire of God’s holiness will consume sinners who do not have Jesus as their High Priest, who have not been given the righteousness of Christ.

“But, Pastor Dan, I know quite a few people who are not trusting in Jesus. My brother-in-law, for example, says he has no time for this Jesus stuff. Yet, he seems to be doing pretty well. He has a nice family, a great job, and is in good health. Are you telling me he is going to drop dead like Uzzah sometime?”

No, probably not. Yet, the truth is, without Jesus, he will never be able to stand in the presence of the Holy God. One day he, and every human being, will stand before the throne of God’s judgment. The Apostle John describes it for us:

Revelation 20:12 – I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before God’s throne. And the books were opened, including the Book of Life.

Revelation 20:15 – And anyone whose name was not found recorded in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire.

Now, folks have different ideas as to exactly what that means. However, I think the Bible is clear that being in “the lake of fire” means constant, eternal punishment. We often call it hell.

No, friends, the lake of fire or hell is not a topic I talk about a lot in sermons. I am not an old-fashioned “fire and brimstone preacher.” I focus more on the glory of God’s grace and how his goodness and love are experienced through Jesus Christ.

Those are frequent themes because they are at the heart of the gospel, the message the apostles preached and what the Lord has called me to proclaim.

Yet, I certainly believe hell is a reality. I also believe only those who have been given the righteousness of Jesus will escape that fate. As I have said before, God is free to grant his salvation to anyone he wishes. However, the only people the Bible tells us will experience this salvation are those trusting in the Lord Jesus.

John 3:36 – The one who believes in the Son has eternal life, but the one who rejects the Son will not see life; instead, the wrath of God remains on him.

Folks, because we believe that is true, we as a church are committed to persuasively proclaiming the gospel here on the Iron Range and in places all over the planet.

Yet, a lot of folks outside the church, and some inside, don’t take that warning very seriously. And I think the primary reason is because they have decided God is “safe.” After all, these folks often think God’s primary role is to make us happier.

Thus, they reason, ignoring him – violating his commands and denying his authority – might disappoint God, but he certainly will not do anything we would find unpleasant.

They highlight the verse, “God is love,” and insist forgiving is something God just naturally and automatically does when people do something wrong.

But, this is not the God of the Bible! Because of God’s perfect holiness, forgiveness can only come at a great cost. This was the price Jesus paid when he died on the cross. The physical and spiritual agony Jesus endured points to just how seriously God takes sin.

If there was another way for God to save us, then Jesus would not have had to die. The cross is a reminder that, from God’s perspective, the only perspective that really matters, sin must be punished. **Those who refuse to have Jesus pay the penalty for their sins, must pay that penalty themselves.**

This is a harsh reality and means that for those not trusting in Jesus Christ, God is not safe and is very dangerous.

Friend, at this point, I would just pause to urge those of you not trusting in the Lord Jesus to turn to him and receive the salvation only he can provide. It is the only way to be safe for eternity.

If you are not sure what that means, please make sure you talk to me or Pastor Mark after the worship service.

Those of us who are believers in Jesus Christ have found an everlasting refuge in which we are eternally safe and secure. **Yet, in one sense, we don’t always experience God as being “safe.”**

Hebrews 12:6 – For the LORD disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child.

Friends, this is not an easy verse to understand. It doesn’t mean every unpleasant thing that happens in our lives is because God is punishing us. There are multiple reasons why we suffer.

The verse does mean, however, that sometimes the pain and difficulty in our lives is intended to drive us away from our sin and to the Lord.

Sometimes, the Lord uses natural consequences. A person who drinks too much or eats too much may suffer health issues that will cause him/her to lean more fully on the Lord.

Sometimes, God may intervene more directly, actually causing Christians to experience difficulties because he knows these difficulties will help us grow in our faith and closer to him.

“Does God really do that, Pastor Dan?” I think so. At least he did in the New Testament:

In Acts 5, we have the story of Ananias and Sapphira. Were they genuine believers in Christ, true Christians? I think so. I don’t really see evidence to the contrary. Yet, God struck them dead because they lied to the Holy Spirit and pretended to be more generous in their giving than they really were.

The whole church in Jerusalem found out that God was not safe. When you ignore his commands and rebel against him, there may be consequences, even extreme consequences.

In the church at Corinth, there were folks, apparently genuine believers, who were abusing the Lord’s Supper, not taking that time seriously. They focused on filling their own stomachs rather than remembering the Lord. The Apostle Paul tells them:

1 Corinthians 11:30 – That is why many of you are weak and sick and some have even died.

These were the consequences of their sin. When we celebrate the Lord’s Supper here at CBC, I always give a warning about not participating if you cannot do so in a manner worthy of the Lord. I don’t really spell out what those consequences might be.

One friend, who is the pastor of a small church, tells his people, “If you abuse the Lord’s Supper, you might get sick and even die. The Lord might strike you dead, right in this room.” That is what he tells them. It may be why his church is small. But he is reminding those abusing the Lord’s Supper that God is not safe if that is what you are doing.

Folks, Christians who rebel against the Lord will find out that even though God is always good, he is not always safe. As one friend puts it, “Do I feel secure in my salvation? Yes. Do I feel secure enough to go and hire a prostitute tonight? No!”

Folks, I doubt anyone said to Uzzah that morning. “Now, be careful how you handle that Ark today. Don’t touch it, Uzzah. God’s holiness is not something to play around with.” Even if he had been warned, would he have heeded it?

Friends, this morning we have been warned. God is not safe. He is holy. He cannot stand sin and imperfection, **but God is also good.** He loved us so much that he sent Jesus, his one and only son, to pay the penalty for our sin and imperfection. He makes it possible for us to safely and securely approach God and be in his presence.

A God who is not safe, but very good is one we can trust, love, serve and adore. Let’s express some of that adoration right now.