

**Introduction:**

- A. My hometown, Britton, SD, celebrated its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary last weekend on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. The population sign on the edge of town says 1328, but the paper said thousands came for the festivities. One feature was an all-school reunion—anyone who'd ever attended school there was welcome back. I saw some really old people! And my first grade teacher talked to me. Then there was the parade—200 units. Floats, tractors, trucks, kids, horses, more tractors. Stretched for two miles! But it was fun to have all these people home again from far and near.
- B. In our Bible story today, the newly crowned King David called for a kind of national reunion, complete with a unique parade. Turn to **1 Chron. 13**. The main focus of all this was the ark of the covenant. The ark was that gold-covered box with angels on top that was originally at the heart of the tabernacle, the elaborate tent structure that God told Moses to build as the focus of Israel's worship. By David's day, the ark itself had been separated from the rest of the tabernacle, also called the Tent of Meeting, and the ark had been in storage at the home of a guy named Abinadab for about 20 years. Listen to **1 Chron 13:1-6...**

David was establishing a new kind of kingdom. Look at **14:2...** He had a new capital city—Jerusalem, the city of David. He wanted to leave the ways of his predecessor, Saul, behind because Saul had *not* inquired of the Lord. Chronicles makes a big deal of the contrast between Saul and David. Remember what it said about Saul in **1 Chron 10:13-14...** David is not going to govern like that, so he wants to bring the ark out of mothballs and move it to the capital city of Jerusalem, because he wanted God to be at the center of his kingdom's life.

**Vv.7-8...** This was a big parade, with people from all over the kingdom following that new oxcart carrying the golden ark with the shining angels—the cherubim—on top. It was sort of their version of “76 trombones led the big parade with 110 cornets close at hand”—all kinds of instruments. The cart itself lurched along on the primitive road, traveling the eight miles to Jerusalem. Two of Abinadab's sons, Uzzah and Ahio, young men who had grown up with this ark on their property, who were as familiar with this treasure as you are with grandma's china closet in your dining room, were put in charge of keeping an eye on it. I imagine them walking along in their farmer work shirts and blue jeans, a bit embarrassed and proud of all the attention they're getting. They weren't Levites or priests; just a couple of farm boys guarding this old relic.

What happened next seemed like no big deal. They were passing a certain farmer's threshing floor when one ox caught its hoof on a rough place, stumbled a little, the cart lurched, the ark shifted. **Vv.9-10...**

The parade stopped in its tracks. The music died out in a wave spreading back down the line. People were saying, “*What? What happened?*” And at the front of the line, behind the oxcart, David was stunned. Speechless. Then he got angry: **v.11...** *Perez Uzzah* means “*outbreak against Uzzah.*” Remember that expression, “*the LORD's wrath had broken out.*” David was thinking, “*What's the deal! What kind of God are you!?*” Then, the Bible says, he became afraid: **v.12-13...** He parked the ark right there in the nearest driveway, belonging to a guy named Obed-Edom, and everyone trudged home in bewildered silence.

- C. This story of Uzzah, the ark and oxcart is hanging in the air, and everyone who hears it is thinking, “*What's up with that?*” And then the Chronicler completely changes the subject. Look at **ch. 14**. **Vv.1-2** tell how King Hiram of Tyre to Israel's north very kindly provided all the materials for David's new palace in Jerusalem, and **v.3-6** tell about all the children born to David in the years ahead. But we're still thinking about Uzzah. What about his house and kids?!

But the storyteller forges on, telling two stories about how David defeated Israel's archenemy, the Philistines. Listen to the first story: **v.8-12...** We're meant to notice some specific things there. First, that “*David inquired of God,*” and that led to the victory. Secondly, did you notice that expression, “*As*

waters **break out**, God has **broken out** against my enemies”? That’s the word used in the story where God *broke out against* Uzzah. Again the place name: *Baal Perazim*—“*the lord who breaks out.*” And notice what David did with their gods: he burned them. The ultimate indictment of their powerlessness.

The second story in **vv.13-16** is much the same. The Philistines raid. David inquires of the LORD. God gives him a unique strategy for victory. David follows it, and the Philistines are beaten. **V.17** sums up what happened...

Here’s the strange thing. According to 2 Sam 5-6, these stories actually happened *before* the incident with Uzzah and the ark. The Chronicler employs a kind of flashback. It is as if he sets us up with the story about Uzzah’s death for touching God’s ark, leaving us hanging, angry and afraid like David, wondering what kind of God we serve who strikes men dead like that. Then he reminds us of these other stories about all the ways God blessed David—the favor of a foreign king, all his kids, the stunning victories over enemies—as if to say, “*Same God! Same God as the one who struck Uzzah dead. What do you make of that?*” Here’s what we must make of it:

**I. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT GOD FAITHFULLY BLESSES HIS PEOPLE WHEN WE SEEK HIM**

- A. The Chronicler gives us this flashback to say, “Don’t get the wrong idea about our God. God is not unpredictable, short-tempered, unreasonable. The fact is, our God faithfully blesses his people.” That is what God is like in the Old Testament, the New Testament and today. Take Obed-Edom, the guy on whose property they stashed the ark. Look back at **13:14...** We learn later that Obed-Edom is a good man, highly respected in Israel. When God takes up residence in the home of someone like that, good things happen. Blessing is God’s default pattern, his normal way.
- B. The key to living in God’s love and blessing is to “inquire of the LORD” and to “seek him.” Those two synonymous phrases are key in this book. Remember, that is what King Saul did *not* do. The whole reason for bringing the ark to Jerusalem was so Israel could inquire of God and seek him.
- C. We cannot just inquire of God when we are at our wits’ end, when we’ve tried everything we could think of first. God doesn’t expect us to handle things ourselves and only call him if life is really out of hand. Seeking God is to be our way of life. It is an act of humility—of a servant, on all occasions of life, saying to our Master, “*What would you have me do now?*” Inquire of God even when you think you know what to do. Illus.: Somewhere recently I read a story where the writer said of a certain woman, “*She prayed about everything.*” I can’t remember anything else of the story, but I know this: God blessed that woman’s life!
- D. There is this goofy idea in the world that one must be very choosy about when to bother God. “*Lord,*” people say, “*I know you’re very busy, and have lots on your mind, but I need your help.*” Or they say, “*I don’t want to bother God with my little problems.*” That is all baloney! God can’t be “too busy.” God cannot have “too much on his mind.” Nobody ever *bothers* God by inquiring of him. **The Bible says, again and again, that if you want God’s blessing on your life, always inquire of him; always seek his face, seek to see him, to be with him as you sort out what to do.**
  - **Deut. 4:7:** *What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him?*
  - **Ps. 50:15:** *Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.*
  - **Matt. 7:7:** *Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.*
  - **Phil. 4:6,7:** *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

- E. There are things going on right now in your life where you need to inquire of God. Directions you're choosing. Decisions you're making. God blesses the person, the church, the nation who seek him. Period. Simple as that.

*Ahem. But what about Uzzah?* Yes, now the Chronicler takes us back to Uzzah. Now that we're clear that God faithfully blesses his people. **Chap. 15:1-3...** David brings all these Levites together and now look at **vv.12-15...** *"We did not **inquire** of him about how to do it in the prescribed way."* Two farm boys in work clothes instead of Levites in white linen. The ark on an oxcart instead of being carried on poles lifted high on the priests' shoulders, out of reach. It didn't matter that all the people were praising God. It didn't matter that they had the right idea about returning God to the center of national life. **When we forgot that God is holy, we are in danger.**

## II. AS GOD'S PEOPLE, WE MUST ALWAYS RECKON WITH HIS HOLINESS

- A. Why was the penalty for casually touch God's holy ark so severe? Because if we do not understand God's holiness we will never understand God's salvation. The risk God takes in coming near enough to love us personally is that we will 'commonize' him, we will think he is like us. **But God is utterly perfect and perfectly sinless.** If we minimize his holiness then our sinfulness doesn't seem like such a big deal. If that happens, we minimize our need for a great salvation. The Son of God dying on the cross makes no sense. We lose any sense of our vulnerability to God's judgment. We may come to believe that God loves and saves everybody and all dogs go to heaven. But a story like this one of Uzzah is a wake-up call. **Eugene Peterson** wrote, *"Sometimes I think that all religious sites should be posted with signs reading, 'Beware the God.' The places and occasions that people gather to attend to God are dangerous. They're glorious places and occasions, true, but they're also dangerous. Danger signs should be conspicuously placed, as they are at nuclear power stations. Religion is the death of some people. The story of Uzzah and David posts the warning and tells the glory."* [Leap Over A Wall, p.144]
- B. When it comes to knowing how to handle ourselves in the presence of the holy God, never trust your instincts! Always inquire of the Lord. The Bible is the only reliable source of how to come into the presence of the holy God. David didn't look up in Scripture how the ark was to be transported. *After all, what's the big deal? How hard is this? Common sense. Haul it.* But **God will not be treated as religious baggage.** He will not be hauled along like a steamer trunk on an oxcart. King David himself would not have entered Jerusalem bouncing along on an oxcart! It is no way for a king to be treated. God had given clear instructions about transporting the ark, and David found them when he finally looked. People are forever thinking they can approach God when and where and how they wish. Just ask Oprah! Or folks at work. But that is a most dangerous error. For us, there is no need of priests in white linen carrying the golden ark on their shoulders. But there is this: *"Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"*
- C. So should people who grasp God's holiness cower in fear? No, not if they love and serve him. In fact, the right approach to our holy God is to celebrate with all our might. For the first time in Israelite worship, David appointed musicians of every kind to help. Look at **15:25-26...** It says elsewhere that David celebrated *"with all his might."* This holy God is among us. He is our God. He will fight our battles. He will call us his people. He will love us and, incredibly, he will sacrifice his only Son so that we, too, might become holy! And he will bring us to live with him eternally.
- D. There's a sour note in **v.29...** 2 Sam. 6 says she thought David was humiliating himself carrying on like that. She is the last vestige of Saul in this story. She was a chip off the old block, with the godless heart of Saul. Some things never change. Those who do not know our God will despise our passion for him. My wife came across an old African proverb: *"Those who do not hear the music think the dancer is mad."* We hear, in our relationship with God, a music that ought to make us sing, bang on tambourines and dance. But expect the others to think we are mad for loving God so passionately.

Illus.: You probably remember that classic exchange in C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, when the children first hear about Aslan and learn that he is a lion, not a man. Susan asks, *"Is he – quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."*

*"That you will, dearie, and no mistake," said Mrs. Beaver, "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly."*

*"Then he isn't safe," said Lucy.*

*"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver. "Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the king I tell you."* [pp.75,76]