

# Seeking the Presence of God?

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 27 May 2018

Preacher: Martin Ayers

[ 0 : 00 ] The whole of chapter 6, which is on page 309. The Ark Brought to Jerusalem.

David again brought together all the able young men of Israel, 30,000. He and all his men went to Bala in Judah to bring up from there the Ark of God, which is called by the name, the name of the Lord Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim on the Ark.

They set the Ark of God on a new cart and brought it from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, were guiding the new cart with the Ark on it, and Ahio was walking in front of it.

David and all Israel were celebrating with all their might before the Lord, with castanets, harps, lyres, tambourines, rattles 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.

[ 1 : 18 ] David was afraid of the Lord that day and said, How can the Ark of the Lord ever come to me? He was not willing to take the Ark of the Lord to be with him in the city of David.

Instead, he took it to the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. 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.

Now the king was told, The Lord has blessed the household of Obed-Edom and everything he has because of the Ark of God. So David went to bring up the Ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the city of David with rejoicing.

When those who were carrying the Ark of the Lord had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fatted calf. Wearing a linen ephod, David was dancing before the Lord with all his might, while he and all Israel were bringing up the Ark of the Lord with shouts and the sound of trumpets.

As the Ark of the Lord was entering the city of David, Michal, daughter of Saul, watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, she despised him in her heart.

[ 2 : 23 ] 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.

After he had finished sacrificing the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord Almighty. Then he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates, and a cake of raisins to each person in the whole crowd of Israelites, both men and women.

And all the people went to their homes. When David returned home to bless his household, Michal, daughter of Saul, came out to meet him and said, How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, going around half naked in full view of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would.

David said to Michal, It was before the Lord who chose me rather than your father or anyone from this house when he appointed me ruler over the Lord's people Israel. I will celebrate before the Lord.

I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honour. And Michal, daughter of Saul, had no children to the day of her death.

[ 3 : 35 ] This is the word of the Lord. Thanks, Katrina, for reading. And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet with some questions as well for reflection and discussion.

If you'd find that helpful. If you could keep your Bibles open, that would be really helpful to me. 2 Samuel chapter 6, so that we see that everything I say comes from there, rather than me just making stuff up.

But let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling.

Heavenly Father, we pray that as we hear your word this morning, you will speak clearly, that you will by your Spirit align our hearts with your message, that we will grow to know you better in your whole character and respond with joyful worship.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. So we're thinking this morning about the presence of God. And I think searching for God is a basic activity of every human being.

[ 4 : 45 ] Even friends I have who are atheists who would say there is no God would still say that they have searched for God, just that they couldn't find him. They don't think that he's there, or that they didn't like what they found.

Of course, lots of people wouldn't call it a search for God. They might say that they're just hungering for something more than the material world around us, hungering for purpose, hungering for meaning, for peace.

But in those things, we're looking for things that only God can really give us. The leading Jewish rabbi, Eric Yoffe, writes this, For most of us, the hunt for God never stops.

We deny God, curse God, and demand proofs of God's existence that we will never get. But the search continues, motivated by a sense, often just a hunch, or the slimmest instinct, that there is holiness in our world that only God's presence can account for.

Or the atheist philosopher Sartre said this, That God does not exist, I cannot deny, that my whole being cries out for God, I cannot forget.

[ 5 : 58 ] See what he's saying? He's saying, I don't believe in God, but I'm hungry for what only he could give me. And in the Bible, God makes himself known to us as the powerful, joy-giving, unchanging, steadfast, gracious and compassionate God, who is just, who is slow to anger, who is rich in love, who forgives people who turn to him.

But how do we turn to him and come to him and find him? Well, 2 Samuel 6 gives us answers to those big, basic questions. And I love this chapter of the Bible because it's a chapter that, when you first read it, if you're anything like me, you think, what on earth has this got to do with me in the 21st century?

It's about an ancient wooden box and someone dies when they touch it. What am I going to get out of this? And yet, when you get into it, you see that it's got so much to say to us about God and how we connect with him.

So we're going to look at the frightening thing that David discovers, the incredible thing only David can do, and then the humiliating way David responds. So first of all, the frightening thing that David discovers.

Just a reminder of what's been going on. Back in David's time, 3,000 years ago, God was building a kingdom and it was a nation state. His people lived in one place, in a land that he'd given them, Israel.

[ 7 : 22 ] And last week, we saw in chapter 5, at last, God put his chosen king in authority over his people, King David. And for us today, God is also building a kingdom.

But Jesus said, my kingdom is not of this world. So we're not looking to find territory and set up a nation state as God's people today. His kingdom is wherever his reign expands, his saving reign, as people put their trust in him.

So that as we, as citizens of God's kingdom, as members of his church, as we look at his kingdom back in Israel under David, we learn about the kingdom God is calling us to be part of today.

Last week, we started to get a glimpse of Israel's golden age as under God's chosen king, he gives them rest from their enemies and they find security. What's God going to do next?

Well, we know it's something momentous because David gathers 30,000 men together in verse 1. And then let's pick it up again at verse 2. If you have a look with me, verse 2.

[ 8 : 26 ] He and all his men set out from Baalah of Judah, that's about nine miles from Jerusalem, to bring up from there 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.

Now, I don't know about you, but my problem with the ark is that I only really knew about it from Raiders of the Lost Ark, the Indiana Jones film. And I can see from people's reaction, I'm not the only one. So what was the ark?

It was a small box, about four feet by two feet, but it symbolized the presence of God, specially present among his people. It had two angels, or cherubim, above it.

And it represented the throne of God, as though we know that God is enthroned in the heavens. So if you think about the heavens as above us, it's like the ark is a footstool for his feet to rest on, present among his people.

God is reigning in heaven, but he's present on earth. So what's David doing here? God is bringing God into the midst of his people. So this event might seem very alien to us, but actually it's a response, an appropriate response, to the greatest human problem.

[ 9 : 43 ] The greatest human problem is that we are cut off from the presence of God. And David knows that the culmination of Israel's golden age can only come if God himself is present at the heart of his kingdom.

So David's hoping for a momentous day for his people. And they start moving the ark, and they get a new cart for it. And these two men, Uzzah and Ahio, are right with it.

They're leading the way. And there's nothing half-hearted about verse 5, is there? Verse 5, David and the whole house of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the Lord, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, rattles, and cymbals.

But they hit a bump in the road, in verse 6, and the oxen stumble, and the ark starts to wobble on the cart. When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God because the oxen stumbled.

Imagine looking on, there's this moment where you hold your breath, the ark looks like it's going to topple over, it might break, everyone's panicking, then thank goodness, Uzzah was there. He just reacted quickly, he just grabbed the ark, just get it back on the cart, and we carry on.

[ 11 : 01 ] And we think, oh, the panic's over. And then look at verse 7. 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.

It's not comfortable reading, is it? And I don't know what you think, but personally, I find it a struggle to come to terms with what happened here. It seems only natural to feel some sympathy towards Uzzah.

All he was doing was trying to stop the ark from falling off the cart, and yet suddenly, the party's over, everyone goes home, and Uzzah's lifeless body is lying in the road.

How do we make sense of that? Well, one thing to say about it is, it must have happened. I mean, you just wouldn't make this up, would you?

If you were making up the Bible, you would never make up this story. And I guess the main reason why I find it hard is that my view of God is far too comfortable. I slip into thinking of God in a cozy way, a casual way, and this raises an important thought for any of us who feel that we're searching for the truth about God.

[ 12 : 18 ] And it's this thought. It's, what if we find God and actually, he's terrifying because he is so pure? What if God is so utterly good, his presence would actually put us in terrible danger?

Now, David's intentions were spot on. But not his methods. He's forgotten that you can only approach God on God's terms. The first clear warning light comes in verse 3, when they wheel out their new cart.

God had made clear in Exodus chapter 25 of the Bible, there's only one way to carry the ark. The Levites have to carry it, and they use poles that they insert through the rings on either side of the ark.

You can imagine it. The king's turned up. Special day. The band's ready. Oh, sorry. Did you say we can't find the poles? I thought we put the poles. Oh, we haven't brought the poles. Oh, well, not to worry.

Let's just use a cart. That'll do. That'll do for God. It's all far too casual. And then Uzzah touches the ark, but the people were warned by Moses in Numbers chapter 4, no human hand is ever to touch the ark.

[ 13 : 34 ] It's very clear in God's word. So this is people meeting in God's name, but treating the word of God lightly. Maybe they thought to themselves, well, yeah, God's word is clear on that point.

The commands are clear, but they were written a long time ago, weren't they? It was a different culture back then. We've moved on now. God wants us to use our initiative. Maybe they went with their feelings.

Maybe they said, well, I know God's word says this, but I really feel like God's saying this will be fine because he's gracious, isn't he? Let's just get on with it. God won't really mind.

But the Bible warns us through events like this about God's holiness. God's holiness is his godness, the way he is a creator and we're creatures. He's different to us.

And it means that he's perfectly good. God's holiness is his godness, and Uzzah took that lightly under the guidance of David. He's at least a bit responsible, and Uzzah loses his life.

[14:32] And when we find that hard, perhaps we need to ask, is the God of the universe not entitled to judge people when they break the law that he has given them?

So God is a God of perfection, of blazing purity. We talk about God as a fire. We get excited about God being a fire.

And yet we've seen the wildfires. We've seen wildfires in Scotland this week, haven't we? Fire is dangerous. And God is described in the Bible as a consuming fire. And we are covered in the muck of our own law-breaking.

We're no better than Uzzah. We've not broken that law, but we've broken God's commands. And God is perfectly right to judge us. Uzzah died on the spot that day, and God uses events like that where he breaks in and brings his judgment forward on people to warn us that he will punish sin.

So let me ask you, when do you take God too casually? Where might we have tamed God so that he suits us and meets our needs instead of recognizing that we really, we live to serve him in reverence and awe?

[15:52] Sometimes in our churches today, in the vocabulary we use about God, and sometimes in the songs we sing about God, have we sentimentalized God? Have we tamed God so that we find a chapter like this so shocking in the Bible?

Now as Christians, of course, we're not in this kind of danger before God when we sin because God has covered up all of our sins, past, present, and future, in what Jesus has done.

He's covered them with the blood of his Son. But nonetheless, this is the same God who we know. And it's good to remember it when we use the language of coming into the presence of God.

We have that privilege today. Any of us, anytime, anywhere, as Christians, can come into God's presence. We can draw into his presence and pray. It's why we say a prayer of confession when we gather together at St. Silas week by week.

We can come to God anywhere, anytime. But when we do that, as well as rejoicing in his love, which we must do, as well as feeling security in his promises, which we must do, we should also tremble at his holiness.

[17:06] Well, how does David respond? He asks the question that we should all be asking. He knows that God's people need God's presence, but look at verse 9. David was afraid of the Lord that day and said, how can the ark of the Lord ever come to me?

He was not willing to take the ark of the Lord to be with him in the city of David. Instead, he took it to the house of Obed-Edom, the Gittite. How can the ark of the Lord ever come to me?

But look at what happens to Obed-Edom. He's not even an Israelite. He's from outside. He's an outsider among the people of God. But verse 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. This is the frightening thing that David discovers. Israel, God's people, need God to be with them, but they can't get near him.

And the same is true of us today. We yearn for God when we face the biggest problems we face in life, the brokenness of our world, evil, injustice, sickness, death, depression, mental health issues.

[18:19] We cry out for the God who made us. But we find out from the Bible that God's holiness is in fact our biggest problem. We need God, but we also need to flee from him.

So we need a way that we can seek God's presence without getting killed for our sin. In David's language, how can the ark of the Lord ever come to me?

That brings us to our second point, the incredible thing only David can do. So things change in verse 12. Let's read from verse 12. Now King David was told, the Lord has blessed the household of Obed-Edom and everything he has because of the ark of God.

So David went to bring up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the city of David with rejoicing. When those who were carrying the ark of the Lord had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf.

Wearing a linen ephod, David was dancing before the law with all his might while he and all Israel were bringing up the ark of the law with shouts and the sounds of trumpets.

[ 19 : 33 ] So David is an ideal king here. He's leading the people in keeping God's law. But he's not just a king. You see that? What's he wearing? He's wearing the garment of a priest, the linen ephod.

That's what the priests wear. And he's making sacrifices, a bull and a calf, because he knows his Bible. He knew that there has to be a blood sacrifice before the holy God can dwell among his people.

And so because of his work, God's presence can come in among the people. And things are very different for us today, but God is exactly the same.

And you see the key point in these ancient shadows around David. What people like you and me need more than anything else is to be in God's presence. But because of our sin, the only way that presence can be manifested among us is through a righteous king who is also a priest.

And then these shadows get fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our ark. He embodied the presence of God. The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. He is our king, born in David's royal line as a descendant of David, to lead us in righteous obedience of God's word.

[ 20 : 51 ] And he is our high priest who stands between us and God and pleads for us. He pleads his own sacrifice of himself once offered on the cross. On Calvary, Jesus was struck down by the holiness of God as a sinful man in our place so that we don't have to be struck down by that holiness when we encounter God.

We take refuge in Jesus from God's holiness and approach him. That's the incredible thing that only David can do as he points us to the one after him, the greater David, Jesus Christ.

God's chosen priest king, the heroic man, the only man who brings God's presence to anyone who trusts him. So that's the incredible thing only David can do.

Thirdly and lastly, let's look at the humiliating way David responds. We see two different responses to God's offer to know us and be with us in this last section.

One is a proud response and one is of great humility. So if you look with me at verse 16, as the ark of the Lord entered the city of David, Michael, daughter of Saul, watched from a window and when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, she despised him in her heart.

[ 22 : 09 ] Now we come back to Michael later but first we see more about David's humble response. Verse 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.

after he had finished sacrificing the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord Almighty. Then he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each person in the whole crowd of Israelites, both men and women and all the people went to their homes.

How would we sum up David's response? Imagine you're telling the story to someone tomorrow.

What would you say about David's response here in your own words? He's delighted, isn't he?

And his delight overflows in loving, joyful sacrifice. These offerings in the tent that he makes, they're not necessary, they're not required by God's word, they're just expressions by David of how much he loves God.

And these gifts to God's people, they're a way of loving God's people and sharing the joy among them. Everyone gets a cake to go home with. Now for us today, we don't have an altar to kill animals on and we don't leave the service with raisin cakes and date cakes to hand out.

[ 23 : 31 ] Sorry if that's a disappointment to you. But as New Testament believers, our response to God's grace is all the more challenging. In Romans 12, we're told, therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, offer your bodies to God as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.

This is your spiritual act of worship. So we don't offer dead things on an altar. We offer our living selves to God, all that we are and all that we have, in response to God's mercy.

It's not, I obey, therefore I'm accepted. It's, I'm accepted, therefore I obey. For being accepted by this God of holiness, all by his grace, transforms you.

When you realize that the judgment that we deserve for our sin is so terrible and the solution has been provided by God at great cost to himself in the priest-king, the Lord Jesus, it humbles us and we willingly, joyfully, give him our all.

But David learns that this kind of uninhibited joy about knowing God can meet with a very frosty response, even in your own family. Let's have a look at verse 20.

[ 24 : 50 ] When David returned home to bless his household, Michael, daughter of Saul, came out to meet him and said, how the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, going around half-naked in full view of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would.

Well, what's Michael's problem? She's proud, isn't she? She cares too little about God and too much about what the citizens think of her.

So that instead of sharing the joy of having encountered God, she's resentful and she's miserable. And for us today, if we are willing, like David, to respond to God with extravagant, unrestrained, joyful worship, what do other people think of us?

Michael could even be from Glasgow, couldn't she? The spirit of Michael is everywhere around us today. Isn't this what our culture is like? That as soon as we see someone getting very enthusiastic about Jesus, we get suspicious of them.

I remember hearing, just after I became a Christian, about a multimillionaire who had read C.S. Lewis' book, Mere Christianity, and he was so moved by who Jesus is that he gave 20 million pounds away.

[ 26 : 08 ] And I was telling my non-Christian friend this story because I'd just heard it, and he said to me, what a sucker. Don't we experience that?

In the workplace, among friends, among our families? Sometimes people can even welcome the news that you've become a Christian until they start seeing you take it wholeheartedly.

It can be the reaction of parents if you're a young doctor and you decide that the best thing you can do for God is to spread the gospel. So you want to give up your medical career and go into full-time paid Christian ministry.

It can be the reaction of other people when they see that you're giving your money sacrificially to support gospel work or to help the persecuted church. Or when you move to a smaller house or you move into an area that people think of as grotty because you want to help with a new church plant there.

or even just when your lifestyle changes because you're battling against sin in your life. This is the kind of reaction that we can face.

[ 27 : 11 ] I don't know where God is prompting you today to offer yourself extravagantly to Him. But whatever it might be for us personally, extravagant worship of God looks humiliating to the world and so the world despises it.

And of course it's not always out there in the world that we meet that kind of reaction. Even in church we can be a bit like this as well. Michael is in the kingdom. She's living among God's people. And I wonder if in church too often we get worried when we see people getting too carried away. Instead of joining in, being inspired by joyful, extravagant, godly lives of love, we worry about well what's everyone else going to think?

And it's all too easy in any church to develop a culture among ourselves as a church where the cool thing to do is not to take your faith too seriously.

Yeah, I still go to church. Yeah, I'm still a Christian. But the cool thing is just to stand away from the people who are really wholehearted. Well, when we encounter that spirit, David here gives us the perfect model of how to respond.

[ 28 : 23 ] Just look at his lack of shame in verse 21. David said to Michael, it was before the Lord who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the Lord's people Israel.

I will celebrate before the Lord. I will become even more undignified than this and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honor.

And Michael, daughter of Saul, had no children to the day of her death. Verse 23, again, it's a difficult verse. It's challenging, isn't it? But remember, this was a unique time in the history of God's kingdom and this is the wife of God's chosen king whose obedience to God's word is critical to the faithfulness and blessing of God's people and she is discouraging him from worshiping God.

So God's dealing with Michael like he's dealing with Uzzah in judgment is just. But it's not something we would expect to see today. But just think about how David responds. It's not about him seeking honor. It's about him honoring God and enjoying God. So for those of you here this morning still making up your mind about Jesus, there's some great questions this passage prompts us to ask ourselves.

[ 29 : 44 ] Are you genuinely searching for God? God. We've seen today that God is dangerously holy and in his purity he has to set the terms on which we can approach him.

But Jesus is the priest king that we need and by his sacrifice of himself at Calvary he's made a way for you to come into the presence of God.

You can turn back to God through Jesus today. And yet Michael's shame at David's joy shows us what might be holding you back today. Let me ask are you willing to be brave enough to approach God through Jesus Christ and not to care what other people would think of you when you say I've become a Christian?

Are you willing to trust the Bible here that coming to know God through Jesus all by his grace and work could lead you to having the kind of joy that David had that day?

And for those of us who are already Christians let me ask as we see David's extravagant unrestrained worship how might God be calling you to worship him with your life?

[ 30 : 55 ] What gift can you offer him in thanks to him? What area of your life could you make holy for him? In self-abandon is there something that you can do for God because you're so joyful and so humbled that you know him?

Amen. We'll have a moment of quiet and then we're going to sing in response together. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.