

When God Doesn't Make Sense
Series: David ~ Faith We Can Relate To
2 Samuel 6
August 15, 2010

Have you been reading along in our series on the life of David? We have the passages for each week in the Connection. Anybody read the passage for today? If you did, you might be wondering, as I do, “What’s up with *that*?” This is an odd passage, to say the least. Pastor Doug planned out this summer series on the life of David and I think he intentionally stuck me with this passage for my first sermon back after sabbatical. Today’s story from the life of David is recorded in two places in the Bible: 2 Samuel 6 and 1 Chron. 13 and 15. Open your Bibles to 2 Samuel, chapter 6.

Now, I really mean ‘Open your Bibles.’ We encourage you to bring your Bible with you to worship every Sunday, so that you can follow along in your own copy of Scripture. Our passage from 2 Samuel will not be projected; it will help you to listen if you follow along. If you did not bring your own Bible with you today, please feel free to use one of the Bibles in the pew racks. [p. 300]. We are skipping ahead quite a bit from where Doug left off 2 weeks ago, so....Previously in 1 & 2 Samuel....

When last we were with David, he had just defeated those nasty Amalekites, after which the Philistines attack the Israelites, killing Saul’s sons, and King Saul kills himself rather than be killed by the Philistines. When David hears that Saul is dead, he mourns for him. Then, after consulting with the Lord, David goes to the town of Hebron in Judah, where he is anointed king over the house of Judah, the southern part of Israel. Even though Saul is dead, war breaks out between the house of David and the house of Saul. Abner, the commander of Saul’s army, first fights against David, but eventually, he goes over to David’s side. [are ya with me so far?] Then Joab, one of David’s commanders, kills Abner to avenge the killing of his brother, Asahel. [don’t ya just love these names??] Then Recab and Baanah assassinate Ish-Bosheth, one of Saul’s sons, and David orders *them* killed for killing an innocent man in his bed. [Ish-Bosheth was taking a nap after lunch at the time of his unfortunate death.] Finally, after all this political intrigue and violence, David is anointed king over the northern kingdom of Israel, so now he is king over all the Hebrew people: Israel in the north and Judah in the south.

David is now 30 years old. He’s known for 15 or 20 years that he would one day be the king. And finally he is. He takes the city of Jerusalem from the Jebusites, moving in and calling it the City of David. Once again, those pesky Philistines muster for battle against David, and David, after consulting with the Lord, fights back and defeats them. This brings us to 2 Sam. 6:1-2.

For the first time in more than 50 years, the ark comes back into the picture for Israel. Now, in case you don’t know what the ark was, here are God’s instructions for its design and construction: Exo. 25:8-22. The ark was a rectangular box, not quite 4 feet long and a little over 2 ft. wide and deep, made of wood, overlaid with gold. We’re told elsewhere in the Scriptures that the ark was to be carried only by the Levites, the official priests of Israel, and that the ark was not to be touched or handled by anyone else.

As I read this next part, try to picture it, really see it. Vv. 3-5. Quite the display. Can you picture it? Can you hear the music? Maybe sort of like the Mummers...without the feathers. Vv. 6-7. Is it just me or does that seem a little harsh? I mean, What's up with that?! What "irreverent act" had Uzzah committed? Doesn't it seem to you like Uzzah is just trying to help? Just take care of the Ark so that it doesn't get damaged or broken? And we are not told exactly *why* "the Lord's anger burned against Uzzah." The writer of Chronicles who records this same event says it was because they had not followed the rules. David hadn't asked God whether or not he should even retrieve the ark and bring it up to Jerusalem. And he didn't make sure that the proper procedures were followed for transporting the ark.

But really, the thought of God's anger burning against somebody is troubling in and of itself, isn't it? We like the 'God loves you' stuff. But 'God is so angry with you that He is going to strike you dead' stuff? Not so much. It doesn't jive with our ideas of who God is and how God should act. And when I read this account, what happened to Uzzah doesn't really make much sense to me. What do you do when God doesn't make sense? Here's how David responded: VV. 8-10.

What do you do when God doesn't make sense? Do you get angry, like David did? Does it make you afraid? Does it make you just want to get rid of God, to get away from God, to get Him away from you? Or maybe when God does something or allows something that doesn't make sense to you, you just write God off. Just put Him out of your mind and heart and life. David didn't understand what God had done or why He had done it. And he was angry and afraid. Ever been there? He was so angry and afraid that he didn't even want to be in the presence of God. Remember, that's what the ark symbolized: the personal presence of Yahweh with the people of Israel. David is so angry with God and so afraid of Him that he sort of sends God away. Maybe you've felt that way, too. David is so angry and afraid that he sends the ark away for three months. And the household of Obed-Edom is blessed. So David goes and gets the ark and again brings it to Jerusalem.

But this time, David is careful to do everything right. 1 Chron. 15:13-15. This time, David did things God's way, according to God's instructions. So is this really the point of the story? That if you don't follow the rules God will kill you? Kinda makes you feel all warm and fuzzy, doesn't it? Well, I don't think that's the point. Perhaps the point of this strange and disturbing episode is to remind us that an encounter with God is risky business. That God's presence and God's commands are not to be taken lightly or casually. To remind us that we may not reduce God to our specifications, limit or tame God to fit in our God-box. God's holiness is not to be trivialized. To say that God is 'holy' is to say that He is wholly other, completely separate and distinct from anyone and anything else. God is so different from us. Any human language we try to use to describe God, or His power, His character, falls short. The Bible does use many words and metaphors to describe God, but really, they are all inadequate. God will not be described, contained, managed, or handled by us. Maybe Uzzah's death is a reminder of the danger of trying to manage or control God's holiness.

Maybe Uzzah's death is a reminder to us of the danger of doing what seems reasonable to us rather than what God commands. The danger of trying to control God's presence and power rather than submitting ourselves to it. And allowing God to be God.

Maybe Uzzah's death wasn't as sudden as it seems to us from this passage. Maybe it really came as a result of years of managing God, handling God and God's holiness in ways that made sense to him, ways that were efficient and tidy. Maybe Uzzah's death is a reminder to us that a wrong attitude to Yahweh and His presence brings disaster. You know, I don't think we're really that different from poor Uzzah in many ways. We think God should act in "reasonable" ways that make sense to us. And when He doesn't, we either redefine Him in a way that does make sense to us OR we just feel free to disregard what God says, thinking that surely God couldn't have really meant what He said.

Surely, He must have meant something else. Surely, God didn't mean that all expressions of human sexuality should be reserved only for marriage between a man and a woman. Surely, God didn't mean that we should spend an entire 24 hour period every week doing no work at all. Surely, God didn't mean that we should give ten percent of everything we earn to His work. Surely, God didn't mean we should actually love our enemies and turn the other cheek, and give up everything to follow Jesus. Surely not. That just doesn't make sense to our modern minds. That just seems, well, a bit over the top, doesn't it?

Well, speaking of over the top, as they're bringing the ark up to Jerusalem this second time: VV. 14-15. Can you picture it? Can you hear the shouts and the trumpets? David dances before the Lord and in front of the people rather 'scantily clad' in nothing but a linen loincloth. No royal robes. No golden crown. No stately procession. Just David "dancing before the Lord with all his might." Letting it all hang out, we might say. Here is an image that came to mind, as I tried to picture it: [SNOOPY DANCING.] It is an image of great joy and abandon. In this moment, David was not concerned to preserve his dignity, to display his royal status. David knew that God was the real King of Israel.

Vv. 16. The Hebrew here says that David was literally jumping and whirling as he danced. And Michal, who was David's wife, was embarrassed by his passionate display before God. When you are willing to revel in who God is, to celebrate in God's presence with all your might, some people will not get it. They will find it undignified, embarrassing, too much, over the top.

God's holiness – God's awesome power and righteous commands – *should* inspire whole-hearted celebration and worship in us, but awe and reverence, as well. This story reminds us that God must not be treated with too much familiarity. Yes, as we sometimes sing, "I am a friend of God," but let us not forget: That fact does not make God like me. God is still God. He is still the Holy One, the Lord Almighty, King of the Universe. God is still holy and awesome and wholly other.

I wonder, with all the emphasis we place on our personal relationship with God, on God as our friend, have we lost a bit of what the Bible calls 'the fear of the Lord?' Do we still experience a reverential fear and awe when we encounter God's holiness and power? There's a tension there, isn't there? And it's a tension that we may not resolve, because God doesn't resolve it. The Bible reminds us over and over again that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." But the Bible also says, over and over again, "Do not be afraid." If we fear God, we need fear no one and nothing else. And when we are not captive to fear, driven by fear, we are set free to worship God with abandon and joy – with all our might.

I suspect that some of you here today know something about being angry with God, as David was. I suspect that most of us can think of something that God has done or allowed to happen that just doesn't make sense. There are many things we experience in life that just don't make sense to us. Things that make us want to shake our fists at God, and cry out, "Why? Why did this happen to me when You could have prevented it? Why did this happen to my loved one when You could have stopped it, God?" An 18 year old young man is killed in a car accident. A baby is born and dies a few short days later. The doctor says that terrifying word: Cancer. Your spouse says those heartbreaking words: "I don't love you any more." Your boss says, "We don't need you any more. Your 15 year old daughter says, "I'm pregnant."

And you're angry with God. Because sometimes the things He does or allows to happen just don't make sense. And we wonder, why? And we send God away. Well, if that's you, you're in good company. David, the man after God's own heart, was so angry with God and so afraid, that he sent God away. He was afraid to even be in God's presence. But David also reminds us that maybe the best response we can make when God doesn't make sense to us – as hard as it is, and it *is* hard – is to abandon ourselves to worship Him. Because it is in worship – whole-hearted, 'with all our might' worship – that we come face to face with God in all His holiness, glory, and power.

When God doesn't make sense: Remember and acknowledge with all your might that God is God – and you are not. Remember and acknowledge with all your might, with abandon, with joy, that God is good and holy and right – whether it makes sense to you or not. Whether what God does or allows seems reasonable or not. We never see the whole picture of things the way God does. We *always* see only as in a mirror, dimly. We are from below; He is from above, as Jesus said. Remember the promise of Romans 8:28.

What if God really can make good come out of whatever bad situation you're in right now?
What if God really does have a plan for your life, and it's a good plan and it's better than what you think it should be, even though it doesn't make sense to you right now?

Will you trust Him and worship Him with all your might?