

An abstract graphic featuring a dark background with several horizontal lines in shades of blue and green. On the right side, these lines curve upwards and outwards, creating a sense of depth and movement. The word "HIGHER" is written in large, white, sans-serif capital letters across the middle of the graphic.

HIGHER

Sermon Growth Guide

April 23, 2023

Fear God



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Higher - "Fear God"

1 Chronicles 13:1-14

Key Verse: 1 Chronicles 13:12 "David was afraid of God that day and asked, 'How can I ever bring the ark of God to me?'"

Big Idea: We don't have to fear death.

Foundations

First Chronicles 13:1-14 is a vivid portrayal of what happens when the finite encounters the infinite, the temporal, the eternal, the sinful and unclean, the holy.

The people of God had a word for the overwhelming reality of God, **קָבוֹד**, [kavōd]. This word literally means, "heavy," and was used to depict the value of an item weighed on a market scale, also coming to be used to describe the "honor" deserved to parents (Ex. 20:12).

More significantly, it was used to describe the glory of God almighty. Psalm 97 says, "The mountains melt like wax...and all peoples see his glory [kavōd]." Something so heavy, permanent, insurmountable and mighty as a mountain, is nothing but melting candle wax in God's presence. This almighty, permanent, infinite, perfectly holy and good God is worthy to be approached in reverence, deference, and humility—the fear of the Lord.

While God's response in 1 Chronicles 13:1-14 strikes us as puzzling, perhaps the original reader would have been even more puzzled with Uzzah's actions, and David. For, in both of their responses to their circumstances, what was lacking was a true apprehension of the glory, His worthiness to be feared and His worthiness to demand that His holiness, goodness, promises and power be recognized above all other things.

Understanding God's Word

Why does David ask for the ark to be moved?

Now, together, read 1 Chronicles 13:1-12.

What about David's actions failed to incorporate a fear of God?

What about Uzzah's actions failed to incorporate a fear of God? ?

Applying God's Word

While we are to fear God in a way that leads to worship, wisdom and loving our neighbor, we often have a hard time distinguishing such healthy fear with mistrust and fear of something malicious.

How does God's goodness and love instruct our attitude toward God's holiness and glory?

Witnessing God's Word

As God's people, we want to reflect before the world that we are being conformed after His Son. How Jesus walked before others drew people in to approach a holy God and ask Him for forgiveness in repentance.

How can we model Christ's reverence to God's holiness in His mission to reach sinners?

See, this is why we train ourselves. “The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.” We recite that because sometimes it is hard to say. This is a challenging passage and one of the stranger moments in the Scriptures. What was so wrong with trying to steady the ark and keep it from falling? Did this man really need to lose his life? This is how the life of Uzzah came to a sudden end. Lives end suddenly in all kinds of ways. A grave marker in Tombstone, Arizona, reads “Here Lies Lester Moore. Four Slugs from a 44. No Les. No More.”



They named Uzzah’s final resting place Perez Uzzah. It is important to emphasize as we dip into this series that there is no Old Testament God and New Testament God, there is just God. Sometimes we walk away from these moments saying, “That’s the God of the Old Testament. We don’t deal with Him anymore.” There is one God. This is the same God. We have to square this up somehow. But it does demonstrate how “Old Testament” became something we say to describe a hot wrath; it became an adjective. This is pretty Old Testament today, isn’t it?

This feels very foreign. This is not where we live. You know me. You know how I present the gospel. I live in the winsome, joyful preaching of the better way of Jesus. I live in the John 10:10 gospel: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). Life with Jesus is better than life with the thief, and I want to encourage, to ask, to humbly suggest that you consider taking the Jesus way. That’s where my preaching lives. Jesus is better. The problem is, if it isn’t tempered, this proclamation can lead to prosperity-gospel thinking. God is there to make me happy. God is there to serve my needs. Jesus came to make me

healthy and wealthy and augment my life with blessings—divine butler is He. Others live in the turn or burn school: “You better go with Jesus. You are bad, God is mad, and I’m here to give you one last chance to escape the fire of hell, just repeat this prayer.” I’m not taking us there, church, but here is my conviction. We have become too familiar with God. We have taken God as our buddy. We have lost reverence, respect and, yes, fear of the Lord. We are not lacking in familiarity with God; we are lacking in fear and wonder at the awesome transcendence of God. We need it.

God does not want us to live life afraid. We are trapped by fears of all kinds. We are afraid of so many things in this world. Those are destructive fears. But God does want us to know a different fear, a healthy fear, a constructive fear—the fear of the Lord. In multiple passages we read it, in Job 28, Psalm 111, Proverbs 1 and here in Proverbs 9: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10). The fear of the Lord. Fear God. Why? Because if you learn a healthy, constructive, reverent fear of God, if you fear God, you will not fear anything else. Fear God and dread naught. We see God as our buddy and forget that the God to whom Jesus calls us into relationship is God—the Lord God Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth, awesome in power, terrible in might, holy is He, who made us of nothing, sustains our life with every breath, and Himself judges all people determining who will live eternal life in heaven and who will go down to hell. This is God. It’s something that David and Uzzah forgot.

“David conferred with each of his officers, the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. He then said to the whole assembly of Israel, ‘If it seems good to you and if it is the will of the Lord our God... Let us bring the ark of our God back to us, for we did not inquire of it during the reign of Saul.’ The whole assembly agreed to do this, because it seemed right to all the people” (1 Chronicles 13:1-4). They had a nice vote about it, the military and political leaders.

Sometimes churches vote on things, but we don't elect elders to represent the will of the people, we elect elders to seek the Lord. A little context here. These are the early years of the rule of King David. Saul was king before David, but Saul went crossways with God and things didn't end so well. David wanted a fresh start. The Ark of the Covenant was a holy chest where sacred items were kept from the Exodus under Moses, but more than that, it was the focal point of the very presence of God among the people. David wanted it back in Jerusalem. Go get the ark. It seemed right to them.

They threw the ark on the back of an oxcart. "They moved the ark of God from Abinadab's house on a new cart, with Uzzah and Ahio guiding it" (1 Chronicles 13:7). This is not how God prescribed the ark to be moved. They got used to the ark as a portable presence of divine power, god-in-a-box. "David and all the Israelites were celebrating with all their might before God, with songs and with harps, lyres, timbrels, cymbals and trumpets" (1 Chronicles 13:8). "What a great day for us all," says David. "I, King David, have convinced even God to be on our side! An endorsement from the Lord God Almighty." Super. Let's see how that goes. "When they came to the threshing floor of Kidon, Uzzah reached out his hand to steady the ark, because the oxen stumbled. The Lord's anger burned against Uzzah, and he struck him down because he had put his hand on the ark. So he died there before God" (1 Chronicles 13:9-10).

Why? Why did Uzzah have to die? I don't know that I can answer that for you in a way that you will be fully satisfied. God is God. I am not. There are those who look to this very episode as the reason they walked away from faith. Who wants to honor a God like that? Some say Uzzah died because he failed to recognize the distinction between the sacred and the profane. The ark is sacred, not some war chest to throw on a parade float. Some say he should have known all the rules God gave the Levites about handling the holy things of the Tabernacle and Temple. "They must not touch the holy things or

they will die" (Numbers 4:15). Some say Uzzah revealed in a split second, in that one, tragic, inglorious reaction, that he really thought of God as an idol, just like any other totem or false god. So ended the life of Uzzah in a moment. I won't apologize for it. The truth is, Uzzah is a picture of us all. Our faithlessness, our sinfulness, our rebellion, when it comes into contact with God's holiness we dissolve like ice on a hotplate, like dark when the lights come on, like mist in the morning. Poof! Who can look on the face of God and live?

But it wasn't all Uzzah here. This was David's plan. This was David's idea. It's David who gathered his military leaders to make this happen, David who treated the ark like a plaything, like a tool in some political game. And how did David react when he saw Uzzah fall? Reality broke in hard. Did David hit his knees in humble repentance? Not at first. First, he was mad. When God doesn't dance for us the way we want God to dance for us, ooh, we get mad. "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 Chronicles 13:11). But then the conviction comes. Something breaks in on him. God is God. I am not. "David was afraid of God that day and asked, 'How can I ever bring the ark of God to me?'" (1 Chronicles 13:12). David feared God. But even then, we get another clue as to why this had all gone so wrong. "How can I bring the ark of God to ME?" It's not about you. Are you trying to use God to your benefit or give yourself away for God's benefit for others? Are you asking God to bless what you want to do, or do you want to do what God is blessing? Serve the Lord.

David was afraid of God that day. That's good. Without the fear of the Lord, we continue in our selfish paths thoughtlessly. Without the fear of the Lord, we continue in habits and besetting sins without even trying to change. Why worry? My buddy will get me out of this. Without the fear of the Lord, we fear everything else. We fear what the world can take away from us, the loss of comforts, the threat of dissatisfactions,

the next diagnosis, the next day at work—without the fear of the Lord every breeze is a cause for fear because we live with an impotent god. Without the fear of the Lord, we put ourselves at the center of the universe, egocentrism: “I’m in the middle.” Without the fear of the Lord, we amass addictions to sooth ourselves and relieve the pain according to the flesh. What could God do? Without the fear of the Lord, we see God as our servant, we put God in our service, the divine butler, and we get frustrated when He doesn’t serve at our good pleasure. The fear of the Lord. We need it. “The Lord delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love” (Psalms 147:11). Fear of the Lord is necessary to our sanctification. David was afraid of the Lord that day, and, do you know what? It helped. It got him where he needed to go.

David was struck with the fear of God. Honestly, if this doesn’t put the fear of God in you, I don’t know what will. Some odd stuff happens in the Old Testament, some real Old Testament stuff. Weird stuff happens in the New Testament too. The difference is the Old Testament covers thousands of years and the New Testament covers 50. Weird stuff happens. Uzzah reached out to touch the holy and there he fell, and David was afraid. He found the fear of the Lord, Old Testament style. So, I am glad we live on this side of the cross. On this side of the cross we can see things more clearly. On this side of the cross, we are all the ark. We all have the presence of God within us, the Holy Spirit. If you believe in Jesus, if you are in Christ, you bear the presence and power of God wherever you go. His holiness is inside you. We are all the ark, and we are all Uzzah. We are all sinners reaching out to touch what is holy. Why don’t we fall? How do we live? We live through Jesus. Jesus reached out and steadied the wood of the cross. He carried it on His shoulders, not into the city, but outside the city gates. He made that wood into a holy altar, a sacred mount, a mercy seat, and He poured out His blood as an atoning sacrifice to pay the penalty for sinners, for us, so we could abide in the presence of the holy. Uzzah’s holding the ark.

Do you see that? If you can fathom this, God, at the moment He saw Uzzah reach out and touch the holy, the moment He saw Uzzah fall in his sins and perish on the threshing floor, that very moment God also knew His Son Jesus Christ was coming, the seed of David, in the family and lineage of David, and take on human flesh. Born in the City of David, Jesus would come, and Jesus would die outside the gates of Jerusalem. God knew Jesus would die for sinners. God knew Jesus would die for Uzzah—if Uzzah had an ounce of faith in the promises of God, a mustard seed of faith—Jesus would die so that Uzzah, struck down early in natural life would rise again to eternal life through the death of Jesus. See, the cross runs both ways. In the Old Testament, sacrifices were made to cover sin. The priest laid the sins of the people on the scapegoat, and blood was shed to cover sins. Jesus died, a perfect sacrifice, to take away sin forever. The people of God prior to Christ looked forward to Christ with faith; we have the privilege of looking back to the cross with faith.

I’m happy to live on this side of the cross. But do you see? The cross saved Uzzah too. Uzzah fell into the chasm between a Holy God and a sinful soul, and he fell down and died that day. But he also fell into the arms of the grace of God who would pour out His wrath on His own Son Jesus Christ on the cross so that sinners could be saved in Him. What do you do with a God like that? Lift Him higher. What do you do with Jesus, who took the wood of the cross? Lift Him higher. This is going to be a series, in the end, about worship, about devotion, about lifting God higher. David tried to use the ark as an instrument for his own fame. He disregarded the instructions in God’s Word. He did not fear the Lord. The damage was severe and the lesson cut deep. Today, we can learn from it, look to Jesus, and live.