

## DAVID AND THE ARK

A middle-aged farmer wanted to be a preacher for years but wasn't sure if it was God's will. One day, while he was working in the field, he decided to rest under a tree. As he looked up into the sky he saw that the clouds seemed to form into the letters P and C. As he thought about it, he realized that PC stood for Preach Christ! Immediately, he jumped up, sold his farm and went out to preach Christ. He was convinced that this was what God was leading him to do. Unfortunately, he turned out to be a horrible preacher. After one of his sermons a neighbor turned to his wife and whispered in her ear, "I'm not so sure that God wasn't just trying to tell him to Plant Corn!"

Four members of a religious sect in southwest Virginia were arrested, charged with snake handling and manslaughter. Included in the four were the minister of the sect, the assistant minister, and the owner of two rattlesnakes used.

A member of the congregation, expressing his faith in God, held the two snakes before the congregation. As he did one of them struck the 65-year-old man in the forehead. He died the next day, after many of the congregation prayed all night for his recovery.

The sect takes literally the passage in Mark, "These signs shall follow them that believe; . . . they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (chap. 16:17, 18).

We pity those who confuse faith with presumption. Presumption is Satan's counterfeit for faith. Satan tempted Jesus to presumption when he asked Him to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of Jerusalem's Temple to prove that He was the Son of God. Jesus refused, answering, "Thou shall not tempt the Lord thy God" (Luke 4:9-12).

Presumption is taking too much on oneself; the overstepping of limits of propriety, courtesy, or morality.

We read in the book of Samuel that on account of the apostasy of Israel brought about by the wickedness of the sons of Eli, they were smitten before the Philistines in battle; and that, thinking to make themselves secure against another defeat, they sent to Shiloh and brought from thence the ark of the Lord into the midst of their camp.

But they were defeated again by their enemies with great slaughter, and the ark of God was taken by the Philistines.

The Philistines were very glad to get possession of the ark, for they knew there was a supernatural power that attended it, and they supposed that, having possession of that sacred chest, they would also have possession of the power. So they took the ark and set it up in the temple of Dagon, thinking that with the power of the ark of the Lord united with the power of their god Dagon, they would make themselves invincible.

But the experiment did not work to their satisfaction. Dagon fell down on his face before the ark of the Lord and was mutilated to the extent of ruin; and the judgments of the Lord came upon the men of Ashdod, causing a great destruction, so that they soon became as anxious to get rid of the ark as they had been before to get it in their possession. So they sent it to Gath. And “the hand of the Lord was against the city with a very great destruction.” Next they sent it to Ekron, and “there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there.” 1 Sam. 5:11.

Then the Philistines took measures to send the ark back again from whence it came, and they set it upon a cart drawn by two milch kine, and it came to Bethshemesh. And the men of Bethshemesh (who were Israelites) opened the sacred structure and looked into it, to get a view of the mysterious power that it contained. But terrible was the result; for the Lord “smote the men of Bethshemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the Lord; even He smote of the people fifty thousand and threescore and ten men. And the people lamented because the Lord had smitten many of the people with a great slaughter.” 1 Samuel 6:19.

All these judgments were not arbitrary acts on the part of God, done to punish the Philistines for taking the ark of the Lord from the Hebrews, or the men of Bethshemesh for the sin of looking into it. They have a deeper significance than that. They teach us what is the inevitable result when the law of God is brought into contact with sinners.

The ark of the Lord contained the law of the Lord, written on the tables of stone with the finger of God. This was the potent fact which was the secret of the power that went with the ark. It was the power of the life and righteousness of God; for the law of God is nothing less than His life and righteousness. It was indeed a power very desirable to possess, but no less dangerous than it was desirable. For the

sinner to reach out and attempt to take it would be like taking hold of a wire charged with the most powerful electric current. Death, quick and inevitable, would be the result.

And this is just what the Philistines, in their sinful ignorance, did. They took the ark, thinking to gain the power that went with it; but they only brought into their midst the holy and terrible law of the Lord. There could be but one result,—judgment and death upon the sinner.

The men of Bethshemesh, curious to see more about the power that attended the ark, ventured to open it and look within; when lo, they stood face to face with the terrible law of God, as holy and righteous as Himself! And the law spoke death to them; it could not be otherwise. And more than fifty thousand people perished! When the law of God meets the sinner face to face there is nothing for the latter but death.

Happily for us, God has not left sinners to meet His holy law in this way. The plan of salvation is nothing else but the means He has provided whereby sinners may meet the law and live. And that means is Jesus Christ. He stands between the law and the sinner, and in Him, the sinner can meet the law and not die. In Christ, the sinner exchanges his sins for God's righteousness, which is the righteousness that the law demands. In Christ, also, the penalty for sin has been paid. Christ is the law freed of its terrors, and human flesh divested of its sin. We meet Him as sinners and lose our sin, and also meet the law without meeting its penalty.

This idea is presented by Paul in his letter to the Hebrews. "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, His flesh, . . . let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." Heb. 10:19, 20. Entering into the "holiest," we enter into the presence of the law of God; and well might the sinner fear to enter there and stand face to face with the law which he has transgressed. But the apostle tells us we may enter in with "boldness" through the "new and living way," "His flesh." Jesus Christ is now our High Priest, mediating for us in that temple which John saw "opened in heaven," and wherein also was seen "the ark of His testament." Rev. 11:19. In other words, our Saviour is now "a minister of the Sanctuary and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man." Heb. 8:1. And in the great Judgment day, all who meet the law in Him will be accounted guiltless, and have life throughout the ages of eternity.

Far should it be from sinners to glory in possessing the law of God when it does not come to them in Christ. That was what the Israelites did when they sent and fetched the ark from Shiloh into their sinful camp. When the sacred structure appeared—the symbol of the power and protection of Jehovah—they raised a shout, as if they had won the victory; but when the battle was joined, they were smitten with great slaughter. With the law of God in their midst, it fared much worse with them than it did before. But meeting the law in Christ, the law is a blessing; as it was to Obbedom, of whom we read, “The ark of the Lord continued in the house of Obbedom the Gittite three months; and the Lord blessed Obbedom, and all his household.” 2 Sam. 6:11.

David sent to bring the ark from Kirjath-jearim. “To bring up from thence the ark of God, whose name is called by the name of the Lord of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubims.” 2 Samuel 6:2. In Ex. 25:10-22, we have a full description of this ark, and the object for which it was used; there we find the statement that God would commune with the people from between the cherubim that were upon the mercy-seat—the cover of the ark.

“And they set the ark of God upon a new cart.” 2 Samuel 6:3. This was contrary to the instructions given by the Lord. How the ark was to be borne by the staves (see Ex. 25:12-14); the sons of Kohath were appointed to carry it and the other holy vessels, but even they were not to touch or look upon any of them. See Numbers 4:4-15. In no case was the ark to be placed upon a wagon. Numbers 7:7-9.

“And David and all the house of Israel played before the Lord on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals.” 2 Samuel 6:5.

“And when they came to Nachon’s threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God.” 2 Samuel 6:6, 7. In this we have another illustration of how God regards his work and worship. It may seem to some that Uzzah’s punishment was too severe for so small an act, but such judgment comes from setting up our standard instead of God’s. How do we know that Uzzah’s error was a small one? From the punishment that followed we would suppose that God regarded it as a great sin. Indeed, we must so regard it unless we are willing to admit that God

was unjust. God is just to; the punishments which he inflicts are always proportionate to the sin committed; therefore Uzzah's error must have been a grievous one. The whole proceeding was irregular, but Uzzah, in presuming to lay hands on the sacred ark; overstepped all bounds. Had not that swift punishment been meted out to him, the worship of God would have been degraded, as a common affair, and reverence for sacred things would have entirely died out among the people.

What was it that made that little box of wood and gold so sacred? Why was it to be approached with such awe and reverence, and only by persons duly set apart for that purpose? It was because it contained a copy of the law of God. That which God declares to be his own righteousness—a transcript of his own character—was enclosed in that ark. That law is the foundation of the government of God; it is that by which the loyalty of all creatures is tested. When men lose their reverence for that, they lose their reverence for God's Government, and for God himself. It was on this account that God had given such specific directions concerning the ark.

How do we know what is right and what is wrong? It is evident that it is only by being told. And what warrant have we for calling any violation of one of God's commands a little sin? Do we not by so doing become judges of God? The lesson to be learned from this circumstance is that to disregard any one of God's requirements is a heinous sin; that sin of any kind is exceedingly displeasing to God. Familiarity with sin hardens us; we learn to excuse it, and our standard lowered to correspond with existing circumstances. But God is sinless, and the more sin there is committed the more odious it becomes to Him. If we, then, desire to do what is right, and thus displease God, it is evident that we must in all cases accept the standard of right and wrong which God gives. Our feelings are no criterion whatever, for that which we look upon as trivial, may be regarded by God as a terrible sin.

It is by His law that God reveals His will. "I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea by law is within my heart." Psalm 40:8. Here we find that to have the law of God in the heart, is to cheerfully do all His will. Again Paul says: "Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law." Rom. 2:17, 18. Here we learn that those who know the will of God are those who are instructed out of the law. But God does not

change; we have His word for this. His will concerning man is just the same now as it ever was. This being the case, it follows that His law is always the same. And so it is. Christ said: "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail." Luke 16:17.

If God regarded it as so terrible an offense merely to touch the receptacle which contained His law, how much to look upon those who dare to trample upon the law itself? Religious leaders have impiously presumed to change the law, especially that portion which enjoins the observance of the seventh day of the week, and millions of people have accepted this act. It is considered all right to labor upon the day which God sanctified, because "everybody does so." But the Lord says: "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil." We are to make God's law, and not our feelings, or the practice of the multitude, our standard of right and wrong. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily [as in the case of Uzzah], therefore the heart of the sons of man is fully set in them to do evil." Ecclesiastes 8:11. But judgment, though long delayed, is sure to come, and when it does, it will be according to righteousness, or, in other words, according to the law of God.

During the Battle of the Wilderness in the Civil War, Union General John Sedgwick was inspecting his troops. At one point he came to a parapet, over which he gazed out in the direction of the enemy. His officers suggested that this was unwise and perhaps he ought to duck while passing the parapet. "Nonsense," snapped the general. "They couldn't hit an elephant at this dist—." A moment later Sedgwick fell to the ground, fatally wounded.

In the tabernacle which the Lord told Moses to build, and the pattern of which He showed him in the mount, the chief article of furniture was the ark. In this ark the tables of the law were placed. The cover of the ark was called the mercy-seat, and upon this cover were the figures of two cherubim, one at each end, facing each other. Tabernacle represented the dwelling place of God, corresponding to the temple of God in heaven (see Ex. xxv. 8; Heb. ix. 23, 24; Ps. xi. 4), so the ark represented the throne of God. Thus the law of God forms the foundation of His throne, yet the throne itself is the seat of mercy. In the throne of God "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Ps. 85:10. His throne is a throne of grace, where we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrew 4:16.

The continued existence of all things depends upon their harmony with the will of God, and their submission to it. This is not a mere arbitrary demand on the part of God, He does not require that all things shall be subject to Him, simply to gratify His love of power, as would be the case with man, but because only as all things are dependent on Him can they exist. Two cannot walk together except they be agreed. Man cannot walk and dwell with God unless they are in union with Him; but their very existence depends upon their union with God. Apart from God there can be no life. It is only in Him that we live, and move, and have our being.

But man has allied himself with Satan and his angels in rebellion against the Almighty. His natural mind is now enmity against God.

Yet through the mercy of God man has existence continued to him. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness." Lamentations 3:22. This longsuffering of God is for the salvation of man. Although they have forfeited all claim upon Him, having rebelled against His love, and chosen death, He is loath to leave them, and so has provided means that "His banished be not expelled from Him." 2 Sam. 14:14. The great love of God is shown in this. He "gave Himself for us." "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." John 15:13. "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8. He did this while we were "dead in trespasses and sins," solely "For His great love wherewith He loved us," because He "is rich in mercy." Eph. 2:4, 5. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." 2 Corinthians 5:19. In giving Himself for rebellious men, that thus they might be reconciled to Himself, God shows how greatly He desired that all should have everlasting life. And this love for all, and the desire that they may have everlasting life, is daily shown in the fact that as an act of grace He keeps rebellious people alive, in order that they may listen to His loving invitation, and be reconciled to Him.

But in this mercy the justice of God appears. He has made man in His own image, with faculties capable of the highest enjoyment, for He has given him the freedom to choose his own way, and has set everything before him. The highest possible enjoyment is found in the most perfect freedom; and this God has given to man and woman, in giving us the utmost liberty to choose whatever we will. In this choice there is absolutely no restriction put upon us by the Lord. His strict

justice is shown in His not interfering with our personal right of choice as to what he will have. God knows that only in Him can we find our highest good, and therefore He places Himself before us in the most attractive light, and pleads with us to accept Him; but He will not intrude His presence where it is not wanted. He will not coerce the will. He has in making us guaranteed to us perfect liberty, and He Himself respects the rights which He has bestowed on us. To attempt to compel us to accept His ways, perfect though they be, would be to deprive us of that liberty which is inseparable from God; and so it would be to defeat His own purpose.

Whoever chooses God will have life; for God Himself is life. When the man has yielded to the persuasion of the Lord, so far as to indicate his preference for Him, then the Lord Himself gladly comes in and supplies all his need. He gives him the power to do right, He Himself lives His own righteous will in the man. As long as the man continues to yield to God, so long will he have life, even to all eternity. God has promised that He will never forsake the man who puts his trust in Him and therefore that man must continue to live as long as God lives. That man will find that God's plan for him is the very best thing possible for him. In the presence of God there is fullness of joy.

But what of those who will not have Christ to reign over them? What of them who persist in their rebellion against the Lord? Here is the answer: "For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord; they would none of My counsel; they despised all My reproof; therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them." Proverbs 1:29-32. They resist the Spirit of the Lord, refusing all its pleadings, until it is useless to strive longer with them. They utterly refuse to have anything to do with the Lord, and so He lets them have their own way, which is destruction. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." Proverbs 14:12.

Such ones are self-condemned. Their condemnation to death is not merely the decision of a Judge, but is the natural result of their own course. They have hated the Lord, have resisted all His advances, and have shown their desire to have nothing to do with Him. Since they positively refuse to live with Him, He has no other alternative but to leave them to themselves; and as they have no means of self-existence, they necessarily suffer destruction.



The same love has been bestowed upon the wicked that has been bestowed upon the righteous. It is common for people to say that God has been very good to such and such a person. This is true, but it is not all the truth, and it may convey a wrong impression. The fact is that the Lord is good to everybody. "The Lord is good to all; and His tender mercies are over all His works." Psalm 145:9. The Lord is goodness itself. He is love. He cannot at any time be any other than He is, and therefore He is just as good to one person as He is to another. He is equally good to everybody and just as good as He can be all the time. Therefore it is not because they have not been drawn by the love of God, that some are destroyed. It is because they have despised that love. Having hardened their hearts against God's love, the more He manifested His love to them, the harder they became. The same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay.