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"Uzzah... Died by the Ark of God"

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, 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 Sam. 6:6-7.

There is undoubtedly a word or weight upon my heart, but it is one of those words which naturally one would rather not speak. To be perfectly honest, I have been wriggling with regard to this word, for I know the kind of word that I would like to say. But I am quite sure that the Lord has held me to this, and has a purpose to fulfill, and all His purposes are good and all His ends are right, and so we will just seek to let Him have His way, say what He wants to say to our hearts, believing that receiving the Word with meekness it is able to save our souls.

There are few more terrible things in the whole of the Word of God than this statement which we have just read "Uzzah... died there by the Ark of God". If you think about it for a moment quietly, it is a terrible thing to die by the Ark of God. You can think of people dying far away from the Ark of God, separated from all that speaks of the Lord, dying in spiritual distance, alienation; dying out of touch with the Lord, but when you think of people dying there by the Ark of God, there is something about that which is very terrible, and which comes back at us and surely says that ought never to be. There is something very wrong when, right in touch with the centre and fulness of the Lord, people die; when that which embodies all the goodness, grace, love, power and glory of God is right there and people die by it. That surely is a very challenging thought, "Uzzah... died there by the Ark"! To think that that is possible, that you and I should be so intimately and closely associated with all that which

we understand to be meant by the Ark of God, should have such proximity to it and die, and die there by the Ark of God. That is not the Lord's thought for us; that represents something wrong, something out of right relationship, even though in close proximity.

It is not our thought to go over the ground again of what the Ark stands for; we gather it up into a very few words. We must remember that the Lord has very jealously expressed His will concerning that Ark, as to its nature and its place, and its transit and its content, and that what was in it spoke of this wonderful Divine interposition for the sake of His people; the interposing or intervening that is in His revealed will for their lives, to save them from sin, as in the tables of the law; His interposing to save them from death in their spiritual journey through the wilderness, providing the manna; His interposing for their special priestly relationship to Him on the ground of Life victorious over death, represented by the rod of Aaron that budded. These are grand, great, interpositions of the Lord for His people. The Ark testifies to these great, these magnificent comings in of the Lord for His people, and all inclusively it speaks, of course, of the Lord Jesus, God's great intervention, God's great interposition for man's full salvation, preservation and fellowship - salvation, preservation, fellowship in Christ.

As we know, the blood was sprinkled upon the Mercy Seat on the Ark. That Blood gathers up the whole testimony of the Lord Jesus, to bring us into complete oneness and fellowship with the Lord. The wonder of that Blood! The pillar of cloud and of fire rested upon the Ark as they journeyed, and when it was in the Most Holy Place, while they tarried, the Shekinah glory hovered over the Ark, the glory of the testimony of the Holy Spirit with His people as its focal point in the Ark. It is, "*Christ in you the hope of glory*" - the full testimony of the Lord Jesus. Uzzah came into touch with that; Uzzah had an association with that, and that spoke of the Divine interposition and intervention for His people, for their complete salvation, their complete preservation and sustenance, and their complete fellowship with Him in Life, where death is destroyed. That spelled death for Uzzah, that brought the judgment of God upon Uzzah, and that is a very solemn matter to contemplate. It is something which you and I will have to lay to our own hearts quite solemnly, for we are in touch with that Ark.

You and I are constantly in touch with that Ark; we are in touch with it today and every day, we are in touch with the testimony of Jesus, we are in touch with God's Christ. We want to be quite sure that ours is a right relationship to the Lord Jesus, an adjusted relationship. While there are multitudes dying, perishing, far away spiritually and literally from the testimony of Jesus, and we have great pity for them and our hearts are stirred that they might know the Lord Jesus and we are constantly speaking of them dying without God and without Christ, it is possible for us to die with God and with Christ. Just as solemnly true it is that we may die there by the Ark of God, and I think, really a far more terrible death, if there is any difference.

Well now, what was the matter with Uzzah, and what is it that may have the same result in our own case? It is just gathered up, I think, in one sentence: the infinite peril of familiarity with holy things. The Ark had been in the household of Uzzah for a great many years, probably seventy years. He had been brought up with it, he had grown accustomed to it, it was commonplace in his life, it was an accepted thing, it was taken for granted. Uzzah was a Levite; he and his brother had charge of the Ark, and it had become a bit of their profession, a bit of their business. It had become an ecclesiastical matter, and so they performed the thing from day to day until it truly became a performance, a matter of course, a business affair. And when this movement of David was set on foot to bring the Ark nearer to himself in Jerusalem, the cart was made and the Ark was put on the

cart, Uzzah and his brother took charge, Uzzah stood by and his brother drove the cart, and it came to the threshing floor of Nachor. The oxen became a bit restive, and without any second thought Uzzah put forth his hand and took hold of the Ark.

Now, a great many words are unnecessary, the thing speaks for itself. Familiarity with holy things is a deadly peril. Uzzah had lost God's thought and had dropped into his own thoughts about the Ark; Uzzah had lost God's estimate and fallen into a man's estimate, and now there he lies by the Ark - dead. His lifeless body seems to testify to a spirit which was like this beforehand, that is, lifeless to the value of the things of God. It speaks of a previous inward state. The outward condition, now of death, seen by all, is only the ultimate and the final manifestation in expression of what was there before inwardly, that his inner life was dead to the greatness, the holiness, the wonder, the glory of that Ark and its meaning; the other in the course of time just came to pass as the result of a spiritual state.

Now, beloved, those were, of course, days when God was forever by examples establishing laws. We must remember that the Bible is a book of laws, established by very vivid, outspoken methods to control the ages. It does not mean that at all times the Lord will employ the same methods, but it does mean that the laws hold good for all time, and that the Bible simply says in a very vivid and strong and demonstrative way that such and such things are manifestly right, and such and such things are manifestly wrong, but what matters is not that there should be an outward demonstration of them, but there only needs to be an inward condition which corresponds with them, and the Lord's attitude towards that is the same as is manifested in these outstanding cases. The state may be in us, and the Lord's attitude towards us be exactly the same attitude as towards Uzzah. It may not be that the Lord will strike us there dead on the spot literally, but His attitude is the same. Death is bound to work, not necessarily at once manifestly, but death is working deeply, hiddenly, perhaps imperceptibly, but one day we shall be manifestly a corpse spiritually and that has not come about all at once, that has not taken place by an act, the Lord has been at work for some time. That is what I mean.

The Bible is a book of laws, of principles which are demonstrative in their conspicuous ways, but it is not the outward demonstration that governs the ages, it is the inward law. We have often said that the Book of the Acts is a book of principles laid down for the dispensation. While we shall not always get the outward forms by which those laws and principles were originally established, they hold good just the same. I mean that an Ananias and Sapphira may do exactly today what they did in the book of the Acts; there may not be a breaking through of death on the spot, but the law holds good, death works, and sooner or later the outward expression will come - death. It is the principle underneath. Uzzah's lifeless form only testifies to something spiritual which has been going on, perhaps for a long time, something hidden which now all can see, but oh! what do they see? If they only see a lifeless form by an instantaneous action of judgment, they have missed the deeper thing, they will have to look deeper. And I believe David looked deeper, for in the ensuing three months he was coming to see what that meant. And looking deeper you see this is not something that is all bound up with the immediate. It is something which reveals a spiritual state which has been there all the time. Uzzah had been in touch with this thing all these years and this very familiarity with it has made him spiritually insensible. That does not come about all at once; you never become spiritually insensible to the great things of God unless you have contact with them. The judgment is not always sudden or outward. What was literal with Uzzah may be spiritual with us.

Now, you and I, being so closely related to the greater magnitudes of the testimony of Jesus, the things of Christ, that precious Blood are in danger of a familiarity with the Blood that cheapens it. How jealous the Lord is for His Name, and there is nothing more deadly than for us to have a spiritual cheap association with the Name of the Lord Jesus, for example, and many other aspects of His Person and His work. The peril for us is that we, by continuous close association, should lose spiritual sensitiveness and sensibility to the greatness of what is known to us as the testimony of Jesus as embodied in that work. What I do urge upon you, as I have to urge upon my own heart continually, is that, in view of this peril, you ask the Lord with me every day to keep the sense of wonder alive in our hearts of the greatness of Divine love.

We should have a constantly renewed sense of the wonder of the love of God. There is nothing in this world that can be compared with His love. Never let us take the love of God for granted, never let us for one moment become insensible to the love of God - that is death. What can happen to us spiritually if we lose the sense of wonder of the love of God! That is death, and how great a death is that. The mighty efficacy of the precious Blood of the Lord Jesus! Let us ask the Lord to keep alive in us the sense of wonder concerning that Blood, ask the Lord to make known to us more and more, day by day, the meaning of that precious Blood, give us a constantly growing appreciation of the value of that Blood. If we do not, we are in the way of error. The margin says over against that word concerning Uzzah, "rashness", but it can also be translated "error". You may use which word, you like. "Rashness" speaks of presumption; "error" mistakenness, delusion, and unless we have a growing appreciation of the precious Blood we shall get into error, deception.

I was distressed the other day in a conversation regarding some movement about which there is reason to have real serious questions, that a servant of God, known to be a real devoted servant of God who has now taken a place of leadership in that movement, had said words like these, "We have now left the cross; we came to the cross when we were saved and we had our transaction at the cross then, but now we have left the cross behind and we have gone on." And I cannot but put my finger upon that and say, "That, my dear brother, is the secret of your deception, that is what has led you astray." Oh! beloved, you and I have yet to discover more value in the Blood of Christ than ever we have known, infinitely more than ever anybody has yet known. I think only in glory shall we discover the fulness, the value of that Blood. Ask the Lord to make it daily more wonderful, more real, more full: His Name, Himself, everything to do with Him. You and I should have the sense of wonder, the sense of glory maintained. As soon as we lose that, we have got into death.

I do not know that I have anything more to say. It is not so terrible, and yet it is terrible. There are two ways of viewing it. Uzzah died by the Ark, and I am just afraid that familiarity may be one of the very signs of spiritual death. If these great truths become a matter of teaching, of truth, that is, set phrases used, and if there is not the due sense of the glory and the wonder of Christ in it all, well what is the value of it? You may be all the time dying in touch with it. There is a word, of course, especially necessary for those who in this place week after week, month after month, year after year are having the things of the Lord in a deeper, deeper way presented, in touch with things which a very great many are not in touch with. That is not said boastingly or pharisaically, you understand. A lot of the Lord's people would be glad to have the food that is available among us. The peril for us is just this particular peril, that if the testimony is in any larger measure with us, among us, (not because we are anything more than others) ours is a greater responsibility; ours, beloved, is a greater peril. And so I just ask you, urge upon you, that you go to the Lord continually and say, "Oh Lord, never let this truth become something of the mind, which I take for granted, something with

which I am so familiar that it never provokes stimulation, wonder, praise in me. Keep me very grateful for it, rejoicing in it; keep the whole thing continuously fresh."

There are other phases in which this familiarity may be shown, which means spiritual death, but I leave them. Do remember one thing, that if you and I are touched by that precious Blood, if we are Blood-sprinkled ones, then we are linked with the Lord Jesus, and we are linked with the Mercy Seat, and we become very sacred to the Lord, and to touch one another without due appreciation of the fact that we are the Lord's, we belong to the Lord, may mean death. I am feeling in my own heart more and more the Lord urging to observe the sacredness of His own children. I lay that upon you.

In that delightful book which some of us have read to so great profit, Miss Carmichael's 'Gold Cord', there is a little paragraph which runs something like this. Referring to the way Christians talk about one another, she quotes from somebody who uses words like these: "I can forgive him his exaggeration and his egotism, but there is far too much of that about him which some Frenchmen would call the essence of 'but' - he seems to have some exception to take to everybody". And then she quotes from 'Punch' this, "Do you know that girl?" "No, only to talk about!" That is enough. The essence of "but"! "Oh yes, he is a dear fellow, *but...*" "She is a real child of God, *but...*" And that "but" just throws a veil over the whole. It is that reservation about somebody, and it seems that you can hardly touch a person without having a "but". Now, that may mean spiritual death. It may be just touching something precious to the Lord: Blood-bought, sprinkled with the Blood. That may be a kind of familiarity that does a lot of harm. There is nothing more harmful to the Lord's children than to talk them up hill and down dale, until they are a pretty fine lot when you have done with them: all the good that there may be there, has gone; it is overcast.

The Lord give us the grace to have a holy regard for holy things, whether it be His children or His testimony, or whatever it may be; where there is a sense of sacred, solemn, holy regard for all that is precious to the Lord and especially a sense of wonder and glory in our hearts in our relation to all that is of His Son, the Lord Jesus.

"*Uzzah... died there by the Ark*". A terrible thing; the result of familiarity with holy things. The Lord deliver us from that.