

2 Samuel 4

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, there we go. We're in a series in 2 Samuel at the moment, and it's great having us a regular diet as a church family, that we're working through books of the Bible so that we're letting God set the agenda, even when it's bits of the Bible that we perhaps wouldn't naturally have picked out and gone for. And so that's what we're looking at as we continue our series. And this morning we're looking at chapters 3 and 4, so I'll invite us to look through chapter 3 and recount that story, and we just had chapter 4 read. And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet that just explains to you where we're going, if you find that helpful. But as we come to this perhaps less familiar portion of God's Word, let's pray together. Let's ask for God's help. Father God, we thank you that you are a speaking God. We thank you for your Word, breathed out by your Spirit for us today. We come asking that your Word will not just come to us as words on a page, but rather as spiritual food to satisfy the hunger of our very souls, that you will feed us this morning. You will open your Word to our hearts and open our hearts to your Word.

For Jesus' name's sake. Amen. Amen. Well, I may be anticipating that the projector would break, which I actually didn't do. I actually only have one slide this morning for my sermon. It's a picture of Belinda Carlyle.

Is she coming on? There she is. 1980s pop idol. And she sang this big hit song, singing to the man she loves about heaven being a place on earth. And if you remember the song she sang, when I feel alone, I reach for you and you bring me home. When I'm lost at sea, I hear your voice and it carries me. And then in the chorus she said, they say in heaven, love comes first. We'll make heaven a place on earth. That's the story of the idol of the romantic relationship. You know, if you find the right person to fall in love with, you will make heaven on earth. It's absolute rubbish. But that is the kind of pop culture story that Belinda Carlyle epitomized and has been sung about before and since. But even though that story is ridiculous, we can all connect with the idea, can't we, that we would love there to be heaven on earth. We all dream of a better world, whether that's personally through relationships or it's even just thinking about the wider world and the suffering and the sadness and sickness. We dream of a better world.

Now God promises to us in his word that the world we yearn for is on its way. It's called the kingdom of God. That's why as Christians, Jesus taught us to pray, thy kingdom come, thy will be done. Thy kingdom come on, and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We're waiting for Jesus to come in glory as he's promised he will do. And then he will reign on the new earth as his, as God's promised king forever. And even while we wait for the consummation of God's kingdom in Jesus coming in glory, the big thing God is doing in the world today is establishing his kingdom. God's kingdom is saving reign. And whenever his kingdom advances, as people recognize Jesus as king and put their trust in him, that is God's kingdom building work. And that's the big thing God's doing in the world today. Now in 2 Samuel, this historical book in the Bible, we see that in human history, God placed a foreshadowing of his kingdom. And it wasn't when Belinda Carlisle found this book. That wasn't the foreshadowing of God's kingdom. God's kingdom was when his people, Israel, lived in the promised land,

God's place, under the rule of God's chosen king, David, Jesus' ancestor, King David. And that's what's going on in 2 Samuel. So far, we've seen that David's kingdom at that time, at this time we're looking at, was a bit like the kingdom of Jesus Christ is today, in that God had made clear, that's my king. But most people had not been willing to acknowledge him yet. Just like today with Jesus. And in David's time, there's a rival king, King Saul. And Saul has now died, that was a story through 1 Samuel. But his military general, Abner, has installed one of Saul's sons as king, instead of David. He's called Ish-bosheth. Mainly because Ish-bosheth is a very weak man, and Abner realizes, Abner is a serious guy, and he realizes, as military commander, if I've got a puppet king in charge, I can do what I like. But that's all about to change. And you see that, if you just look over to the beginning of chapter 5 of 2 Samuel, and look at verse 3.

[4 : 52] So that's just after the bit that we're in today. It says in verse 3, When all the elders of Israel had come to King David at Hebron, the king made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel. So that's where we're heading. And the events that we're looking at today lead into that. So let's get into this story. It's a terrific story. And you'll see on the sheet, I've got three things that we see, and then three things that we learn, three implications. So first of all, we see Abner leads people to David out of selfishness. In chapter 2, just a reminder of what we've seen of Abner last time we were there.

Abner, David has this guy, he had three fighting men, Joab, Asahel, Abishai. They were kind of his three fighting warriors, three musketeers, and they're brothers. And Abner killed one of them.

He killed Asahel by plunging his spear into Asahel's stomach. Now Joab, one of Asahel's brothers, is David's fixer. He's his military commander, and he hasn't forgotten what Abner did to his brother.

But Abner is enjoying life under his puppet king. So if you look at chapter 3, we'll pick things up in verse 6. Chapter 3, verse 6. During the war between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner had been strengthening his own position in the house of Saul. Now Saul had a concubine named Rizpah, daughter of Ayah. And Ish-bosheth said to Abner, why did you sleep with my father's concubine?

Now Abner sleeping with Saul's former concubine, it's more than an act of pleasure, it's an act of power. It's a defiant act to say, I am the real king around here. I might have put Ish-bosheth in charge as the nominal king, but I'm the one who's in charge. I'm the replacement for Saul. His concubines are mine. But when he's confronted about it, he's furious. So in verse 8, he flies off the handle and he says, am I a dog's head on Judah's side? It's such a great phrase. Am I a dog's head?

[6 : 59] And he decides from that one moment in petulance to switch sides. In verse 9, he says, may God deal with Abner, be it ever so severely, if I do not do for David what the Lord promised him on oath, and transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul, and establish David's throne over Israel and Judah from Dan to Beersheba. So he goes over to David. David asks for a sign to confirm that he's kind of turning away from the house of Saul. And he says, you have to bring back to me my wife, Michael. She was Saul's daughter, and David had married her, but Saul had taken her back and married her off to somebody else, even though David and Michael were married to each other in the disputes.

So Michael gets brought back to be David's wife again, and then Abner addresses the key leaders of Israel in verse 17. So verse 17, he says, for some time you've wanted to make David your king, now do it. For the Lord promised David, by my servant David I will rescue my people Israel from the hand of the Philistines and from the hand of all their enemies. So it's extraordinary thing to say, because it shows Abner knew all along that God had promised David would be king. He was just living in denial. And it looks from that as though the only thing that was stopping all Israel from coming under David was actually Abner. He says, for some time you've wanted David as your king.

Abner himself has been prolonging the civil war. So in verse 21, Abner goes back to David, and he says to David, let me go at once and assemble all Israel for my lord the king, so that they may make a covenant with you, and that you may rule over all that your heart desires.

So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace. Abner is looking to put the kingdom into David's hands, but why is he doing it? Selfish ambition. He thinks that he can single-handedly establish the kingdom for God's chosen king, and he thinks that by doing that, the rewards for him will be immense. He'll be David's new right-hand man, and it's all about to blow up in his face. That's our second point. So Abner leads people to David out of selfishness. Secondly, Joab fights for David out of vengeance. So just then, Abner's gone. He's gone in peace. Joab turns up. He's been out with his raiding men. He's been on raids, and he hears what's happened to Abner. Abner's come to David, and David's welcomed him, and he thinks David's been a complete idiot. Three times in three verses, we're told that David sent Abner away in peace. End of verse 21, end of verse 22, and end of verse 23, Abner went with peace from David, but then Joab sends messengers to Abner to say, just come back, just come back, and he brings him back, and at the end of verse 26, we're told, but David did not know it. Joab wants to establish the kingdom, but he's not going to trust God's anointed king to do it, and to judge rightly, and then we read verse 27. Have a look at verse 27. Now when Abner returned to Hebron,

Joab took him aside into an inner chamber, as if to speak with him privately, and there, to avenge the blood of his brother Asahel, Joab stabbed him in the stomach, and he died.

[10:19] It's exactly how Abner had killed Joab's brother Asahel, and verse 30 makes that clear. Joab and his brother Abishai murdered Abner because he had killed their brother Asahel in the battle of Gibeon.

So Joab's meant to be fighting for David, but really, he just wants vengeance, and it leads to terrible grief and mourning from David. We'll see that later on. And then our third scene this morning, the one we had read by Cammie, after Abner leads people to David out of selfishness, and Joab fights for David out of vengeance. Thirdly, Rimen's sons destroy David's enemy out of wickedness.

So with Abner's death, Ish-bosheth, the puppet king, is now a bit frightened because he's the guy who was keeping everything on his side, has gone. So in chapter 4, verse 1, we read, When Ish-bosheth, son of Saul, heard that Abner had died in Hebron, he lost courage, and all Israel became alarmed. Then we get reassurance that there's nobody else to take on Saul's dynasty and keep fighting against David. So in verse 4, we hear about how Jonathan, son of Saul, had a son who was lame in both feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan, his father and grandfather, who died in battle, came from Jezreel. His nurse picked him up and fled, but as she hurried to leave, he fell and became disabled. His name was Mephibosheth.

So we come across Mephibosheth later on. We're going to see him come back as a character in the book. But at this stage, the key point is, this guy can't be king now that Ish-bosheth is going to be out of the way. There's nobody to continue fighting against David. And then we hear about Rechab and Baana, sons of Rimon, who were leading warriors for Saul and cold-blooded murder, verse 4. Now, Rechab and Baana, the sons of Rimon, the Beirothite, set out for the house of Ish-bosheth, and they arrived there in the heat of the day while he was taking his noonday rest.

They went into the inner part of the house as if to get some wheat, and they stabbed him in the stomach. Then Rechab and his brother Baana slipped away. They'd gone into the house while he was lying on the bed in his bedroom.

[12 : 27] After they stabbed and killed him, they cut off his head. They bring the head to David at Hebron, and in verse 8 they say, here is the head of Ish-bosheth, son of Saul, your enemy, who tried to kill you. So folks, it's a tale of selfishness from Abner, of vengeance from Joab, and just wickedness from Rimmon's sons. And these are the key events leading up to God's chosen king, David, ruling rightly over the kingdom of God. What do we learn? Well, three implications for us. The first thing we learn is God's kingdom can't be established by selfishness, vengeance, and wickedness. You see, without David's righteous actions at this point, what David does as he intervenes, the whole thing is just descending into a barbaric mess. You know, I watched Goodfellas the other week. This is just like something out of a gangster film. It's like something off Goodfellas.

Abner's men would have clearly would have gone to get revenge on Joab. It would have continued to spiral downwards. Joab's men would have fought back. There would be civil war. Rimmon's sons, Rechab and Baana, they've got raiding bands on their side as well. And this is Israel. It's meant to be a glimpse of heaven on earth. The nations are meant to look at Israel and think, what a great way of living. They must know the true God. Let's find out about him. And it's on the brink of completely destroying itself as a nation. And we're not told about these men because they're unusual.

We're told about these men because it's so typical. This is what humanity is like. And we need to remember that so that we don't put our hope in people to put the world right today.

You know, the things we long for in this world, peace, an end to poverty, an end to conflict, an end to sickness, cures for disease, an end to loneliness. Those are the things we want.

They're not going to be solved fully and finally by politics, science, technology, education, because we're too flawed as people. Ultimately, we're too selfish like Abner was. When people wrong us, we don't forgive them. We're too resentful and vengeful like Joab was. And we're too prone as a human race to acts of wickedness and evil. So the message is don't put your hope in people to put the world right. Only Christ can do that. He will do it and only he can do it.

[14 : 54] It's good to remember that, especially if you work in a job where you have the privilege of being in a job where it's a really worthy profession. If you're in a line of work where you can really see the benefits of what you're doing for humanity. If you're in civil engineering or renewable energy or education or health care or social services or politics or fair trade or relief work. Those are all great places for Christians to be at work. And there are a great number of people at St. Silas in those areas of work. But I want to urge you to resist the temptation to think that those areas of work are more significant for the welfare of the world than the mission of the church.

The great commission that Jesus has given us of proclaiming the gospel that he is king to make disciples for his kingdom. And it's such an encouragement when people realize that.

You know, we had a men's breakfast last Sunday morning and just a few of the guys there who were working in those areas of those professions and yet they've not lost sight of the fact that ultimately what really matters is that we make disciples. That God builds his kingdom.

Because these causes, they're good causes, but they won't ultimately put the world right. Only Jesus Christ can establish God's kingdom on earth. So the advance of the gospel is the hope of the world. That's our first implication. God's kingdom can't be established by selfishness, vengeance and wickedness. Secondly, God's king won't be tainted by selfishness, vengeance and wickedness. It would have been so easy for David just to reward these two guys who pitch up with Ish-bosheth's head for him. They've got his enemy out of the way. But David acts with justice and as he acts, he is a shadow for us in history, a forerunner of God's perfect king, Jesus Christ, and what he is like. So have a look at how he responds to Rechab and Ba'ana bringing the severed head of Ish-bosheth.

It's in verse 9 of chapter 4. David answered Rechab and his brother Banna, the sons of Rimmon the Berethite, as surely as the Lord lives, who has delivered me out of every trouble, when someone told me Saul is dead and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and put him to death in Ziklag. That was the reward I gave him for his news. How much more when wicked men have killed an innocent man in his own house and on his own bed? Should I not now demand his blood from your hand and rid the earth of you? So David gave an order to his men and they killed him. They killed them.

[17 : 40] They cut off their hands and feet and hung the bodies by the pool in Hebron. But they took the head of Ish-bosheth and buried it in Abner's tomb at Hebron. So honoring the man who was killed innocently on his bed in his siesta. It's grim, this, isn't it? It is grim. But in the context, it's the grimness of justice. King David will not let the guilty go unpunished in his kingdom.

Then if we just go back, we're going to see how the king reacts to Joab killing Abner behind David's back. Remember, David sent Abner away in peace. Joab has killed him. So in verse 29 of chapter 3, he calls down a curse on Joab. He says, may his blood fall on the head of Joab and on his whole family. And then he grieves for Abner and he makes Joab and his gang walk in front of Abner's state funeral. It would have been humiliating for them. And so we get these conclusions about David in verse 36, that he is a good king. Verse 36 of chapter 3 is literally, it's literally everything the king did in the eyes of all the people was good. He is a good king.

He's an innocent king, verse 37. So on that day, all the people there and all Israel knew that the king had no part in the murder of Abner son of Ner. He's a generous king. Next verse.

This is a very generous way to describe Abner. Do you not realize that a commander and a great man has fallen in Israel this day? And lastly, we see that he is a gentle king. I'm just going to read the ESV translation of verse 39, which is quite different. But David says this, verse 39, and I was gentle today, though anointed king. These men, the sons of Zeruiah, are more severe than I.

He is a gentle king. His goodness, his innocence, his generosity, and his gentleness. And friends, as you're looking at something like this about David, what we're seeing is, woven into the fabric of history, a glimmer of the magnificence of Jesus Christ. David's flaws are starting to show as well, so we know he's not the final answer. You know, he's got more than one wife at the start of chapter 3, which he's not meant to do. He doesn't deal properly with Joab. He prays a curse on him, but he doesn't punish him properly. And these issues, loving multiple women, failing to discipline the people closest to him, as the story unfolds into Samuel, they will be David's downfall. There will be disaster because of those. We're already seeing the glimmers of his flaws. And I think we also see a brutality in David that's not right, the manner in which he executes the men, his curse on Job's family for generations. It's just the first signs of trouble brewing. But of course, you get none of that with Jesus Christ. He is the truly good king, so that Pilate couldn't find any fault with him. And nobody can ever find the thing that Jesus should have done, that he didn't do, the thing he should have said, that he didn't say. He's truly good. He's magnificent. He's the truly innocent king.

[20 : 57] No charges could be held against him when he was put to death. He's the generous king who comes to die for us, even when we're making ourselves his enemies, so that he can stand in front of God the Father and say, these aren't your enemies. These are my brothers and sisters. He's that generous.

And he's the gentle king. We remember today on Palm Sunday, him riding on in majesty to Jerusalem, where he is the rightful king to reign over the world, and yet he comes on a donkey. And the prophecy he's fulfilling from Zechariah is, see Jerusalem, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey. It's his gentleness being displayed. So that even if you are somebody who has lived your whole life in defiance against Jesus, you've denied that he's there, you've not believed that he's there, or even that you have thought he's there, but you've stood in defiance and said, I don't want anything to do with him. No matter how you've treated him before, if you turn back to him today, he will welcome you with gentleness. He'll receive you and give you peace. Just like David with Abner sends him away in peace, Jesus would do that for you today if you turn back to him. And so as his people, let's be encouraged that we see in Jesus a righteous king who just can't be tainted by anything wrong in the world. And as his people, as we see that in him, let's be inspired to pursue righteousness ourselves. He wants his kingdom to advance today, but never through unrighteousness.

The ends don't justify the means for God's king. And sometimes we're tempted to think it does. We tell a lie because the end justifies the means. We act unkindly because we think, well, the end justifies the means. And even out of a right passion to see the church grow, we mustn't ever think that we can behave in a way that doesn't honor God in righteousness. We mustn't ever seek church growth out of selfish motives and empire building and vanity. We trust God to build his kingdom and we seek to live for him. It's true even when we're sinned against by our culture, which stands against Jesus and doesn't want him to reign, by our denomination. Scottish Episcopal Church has walked away from the Bible as its authority. We may be persecuted by them. It wouldn't justify unrighteousness by us.

We have to be righteous and godly because Jesus calls us to be his ambassadors. And that applies as well. When we go out into the world to make him known, to be his ambassadors. I was just wondering whether there was an opportunity to display God's righteousness at the moment with the strike action at the university. Quite a number of our church family have been involved in or affected by the strikes that are going on in the universities. And in that kind of dispute, a work dispute, people start getting really angry and lose their self-control. You know, the workers who are on strike get very critical of the employers and their behavior. And maybe the employers are critical of the workers. And then you have other workers who are affected by the strike because their colleagues are on strike and they're not. And you've got students who are having their education affected and it's a dispute that's got nothing to do with them. And the temptation is to lose your self-control in that context. So if you're at all involved in that in our universities, maybe just to ask yourself, what would it look like this week for me to be righteous like my king? To be an ambassador for

Christ in the dispute? How could our conversations be full of grace and seasoned with salt? So that's our second implication. We've got God's kingdom can't be established by selfishness, vengeance, and wickedness. Secondly, God's king won't be tainted by selfishness, vengeance, and wickedness.

[24 : 54] And thirdly, let's be encouraged to remember that God's kingdom won't be thwarted by selfishness, vengeance, and wickedness. These murders, these horrible murders, they weren't David's idea.

But in the midst of all the carnage, just notice that God is powerfully at work behind the scenes, not just despite the wicked schemes of these people, but even using their wicked schemes to accomplish good. So that by the end of chapter 4, Abner and Ish-bosheth, these two great obstacles of Christ David and his reign, they've been removed, they've been taken out the way.

God has used people's wickedness to accomplish good. You see the process in chapter 4 of 2 Samuel, because it says at the beginning that Ish-bosheth lost courage, and it's literally, his hands became weak. Then we hear about Saul's grandson, that he is lame, his feet don't operate.

So we go from weak hands to weak feet, and then we go from hands to feet to head, as Ish-bosheth's head is removed. And it's the narrator's way of showing us that the obstacles to God's good purposes of having David on the throne are being taken out of the way.

God is not responsible for the evil, but he is so powerful and he's so wise, he can even use the evil schemes of others to accomplish his good purposes. And it's a principle we see most breathtakingly at work at the cross. In Acts chapter 2, Peter describes the cross like this. He says of Jesus, this man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge, and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. So they were wicked in putting him to death, but it was by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge to provide the sin-bearing sacrifice and save the world. And you can go a long way with a God like that. It means that however awfully you've been treated, however much you feel that you've been stitched up by other people, stitched up by life, God can use that to accomplish his good purposes for you. It means that when we're promised in all things God works for the good of those who love him, we know that it's a promise he can keep.

[27 : 16] It means that if people stand against our mission as a church, we know that God is bigger and wiser, not just to work in spite of people's wickedness, but even to use it as a means to advance his kingdom.

And it means that however bad the world seems today, God will never be frustrated in his goal of sending Jesus to reign in glory forever. Let's pray together.

Amen. We praise you, Lord Jesus Christ, that you are a righteous king, that you are good, that you are innocent, that you are generous, that you are gentle. We're sorry for the times we put our trust in princes. We put our trust in other people. We thank you afresh for our living hope that you and you alone will establish God's kingdom here on earth. We praise you that your kingdom purposes will not be tainted by selfishness, vengeance, and wickedness. And we ask for your help that by your spirit, as citizens of your kingdom, we will hunger and thirst for righteousness.

righteousness. And we praise you that your kingdom purposes won't be thwarted by human sin. More than that, we praise you, Heavenly Father, for the depths and riches of your wisdom, that you can even use the wicked schemes of men to accomplish your goodwill.

we praise you in Jesus' name. Amen.