

# Who Needs a Messiah When Things Can Be This Good Without One?

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[ 0 : 00 ]     Malcolm for reading that for us. It would be a help to me if you could keep it open. 2 Samuel chapter 2. Let's pray and ask for God's help as we turn to his word. It says in the Psalms, The unfolding of your words gives light.

It imparts understanding to the simple. Heavenly Father, Sovereign Lord, as we unfold your words this morning, we pray you would indeed give us light so that we can see and understanding so that we can know you better and love you more.

In Jesus' name, amen. Well, what do you dream about that you think will make you happy? Occasionally on a weekend, we'll be driving through suburban Glasgow and we'll go past the new luxury homes being built in different places, you know, in Bearsden or Lenzie or somewhere.

And it says, you know, you can go and see a show home and they're building this cul-de-sac of luxury family homes. And I think to myself, how nice it would be to get one of those houses, to be away from traffic in one of these nice, quiet streets, to have more space for the family.

The kids would sleep better. I would sleep better. And then I start daydreaming about life in one of these houses that's being built. And I think maybe what I really need in life is to spend my weekends differently, to play golf on a Saturday.

[ 1 : 34 ]     And in winter, I can just go and watch football when you don't play golf. And then there's this couple that we've got to know, a really nice couple, a really nice couple near us. But they've got a white Range Rover, which was quite useful this week, and a white Porsche, which was less useful this week.

But I see their cars and I think, you know, maybe it's time I moved on from our Renault to a car that doesn't break and you don't have to take it to the garage. And then my Travel Zoo email comes in.

I don't know if you get Travel Zoo. It's this email that you get every week that tells you where you should go on holiday. And it points out that there are these infinity pools in five-star, all-inclusive locations.

And then I see people around me who protect their diary more. So they just, they seem to only really spend time with a small number of people, their friends who they've been with for years and years and years.

And it seems great. So there's the package for me. The car, the leisure-filled weekends, the home, the holidays. The small group of mates. And that's the package that, truth be told, I think that's what would really make me happier.

[ 2 : 47 ]     And here's the thing, right? Most of those things that I've just described are not bad things at all. In fact, looking around here, some of you have got those things, okay? They're not bad things. The problem is that I think those things will make me happy.

And for me to get those things, Jesus doesn't have to be king. And so if I don't think I need Jesus to be king, I'm not going to make his priorities my priorities for my life.

In fact, I'm going to resent him. I'm going to resent living for him. And I'm not going to battle against the sinful habits of my life, my besetting sins, because I don't really see how much I really need Christ to reign in my heart.

I've got my plan to make me happy. And it doesn't involve him being in charge. And whoever we are, if that's how we feel, in whatever way we've got our dream, we're not going to be inspired to make sacrifices to make Christ known to other people.

Whatever those sacrifices might be, it might be as simple as we hear Emily saying that we need more volunteers to help in the children's work. Or you hear me saying, well, wouldn't it be great if we had a group of us who committed to the evening service and revitalized it to make it this growing, significant work for Glasgow that we can bring people into?

[ 4 : 09 ] Or I might have some new, great vision, idea, aspiration that requires us all to give more money. And if we haven't decided that we really need Christ to be king, we're just going to keep our head down when we get challenged like that.

If I don't think everyone needs Jesus as their king, I'm not going to speak about him as often to the people around me. I'll talk to my friends and neighbors and I'll hear they've just had a brilliant ski holiday and I'm going to think, they don't need Jesus.

They're living the dream. In fact, they're living my dream. And I won't really want to speak about how Jesus offers them everything that they really need. So that's why we really need 2 Samuel chapter 2 kind of engraved into our mind.

2 Samuel 2 is written to focus us on how much we need God's anointed king to be reigning. Just a reminder of what's going on.

2 Samuel's recording events that happened about 3,000 years ago, 1,000 BC, and they're all part of God's unfolding plan throughout human history to establish his kingdom in the world.

[ 5 : 20 ] God's people living in God's place, enjoying his rule. That's what God is doing in the world today and it's what he'll bring in the future. And 2 Samuel is the story of King David.

We had this picture of him last time we looked at him. Thanks to Michelangelo, there he is, statue of David. And David is this ancestor of God's ultimate king in David's line, the Messiah, Jesus.

God, at this stage, 1,000 BC, he has chosen a people, he's made them into a nation, Israel, and they're living in the promised land. And we know that David is God's chosen king to rule them.

God's kingmaker, Samuel, the prophet, has anointed David already. That happened in 1 Samuel. But the people have been ruled over by a different man, by King Saul. He was their choice.

God rejected him. And in chapter 1, two weeks ago, we heard the news, David heard the news, that Saul is dead. And at the start of chapter 2, we get this quiet but very significant news in verse 4 of chapter 2.

[ 6 : 24 ] Then the men of Judah came to Hebron, and there they anointed David king over the tribe of Judah. That's for the first time in God's history, God's appointed king is ruling over some of God's people, just one of the tribes of Israel.

They're accepting the reign of God's appointed king. But then we get the events we're looking at this morning, and David isn't mentioned at all in chapter 2. And that's exactly the point, because the big idea is this.

Whenever God's chosen king is not reigning, the result is horrific chaos. What we need, what they need now, is for David to kick on and reign over Israel.

But there is this big threat, this opposition. It's a man called Abner. He was the commander-in-chief of Saul's army. And he makes one of Saul's sons king instead of David.

A puppet king for him. And all the other 11 tribes of Israel, they go with it. Now why does Abner go for Ish-bosheth as king? It's because he thinks, Ish-bosheth is not going to challenge me.

[ 7 : 35 ] I've got the army. If he's king, I can do whatever I want. So Abner is like any of us could be this morning. He is among the people of God, but in his heart, he doesn't want God's king to reign over him, because he doesn't want to be challenged by God's king.

Abner already knows that David is God's chosen king. It's not mistaken identity. We find that out next time. So there are two kings among God's people, and most of Israel are resisting the reign of God's true king.

So what follows is this horrific day. And we need to feel how bad it must have been to put ourselves back there that day so that we understand how much we need God's king today.

So we've got three points to take us through the disaster. When Abner rejects God's king, there's a dangerous game, a deadly chase, and then a family tragedy. So first of all, a dangerous game can't be controlled.

It all starts with this threat of civil war. Abner brings his men to Gibeon, and that's quite near where David is. So that's an offensive move. It's a bit like when, you know, at the moment, occasionally Russia sends military aircraft across the North Sea or into British airspace and English Channel just to get the British aircraft up and running, just to sort of escort them away.

[ 9 : 01 ] It's that kind of aggressive move. And here Joab appears. Now Joab is a fascinating character. We're going to come back to him in 2 Samuel. He's David's commander-in-chief.

He's loyal to David. He wants David to be king. But he's a flawed man. He's got more brawn than brains. And he's not going to wait patiently for God to get David's kingship established.

He thinks that by his own brawn, he can get David on the throne. So he turns up. And the problems start with a game. Have a look at verse 13 with me of chapter 2.

Verse 13. Joab, son of Zeruiah, and David's men went out and met them at the pool of Gibeon. One group sat down on one side of the pool and one group on the other side.

Then Abner said to Joab, let's have some of the young men get up and fight hand-to-hand in front of us. All right, let them do it, Joab said.

[ 10 : 01 ] It's a contest. It might just be a game because they're bored, an impasse, like you might have a joust while you're waiting. But more likely, it's trying to solve the dispute between them.

But what starts just as a competition soon goes horrifically wrong. Verse 16. Then each man grabbed his opponent by the head and thrust his dagger into his opponent's side and they fell down together.

So that place in Gibeon was called Helcath Hazarim. So it's like a barroom brawl that escalates into murder and nobody quite knows how. And afterwards they're thinking, how did this happen?

It's like two men saying, well, let's get our strongest men together and have a rugby match. And it just ends in a massive brawl. But far worse because they've got knives. And so they renamed the place Field of Daggers because 24 good young men wasted their lives and nobody could walk away and nobody could make peace.

Just a tragic waste of good men's lives. Just got a picture here. I don't know if you remember these guys. Edward Mayer, Craig Roberts and James Dunsby. They were first class army reservists.

[ 11 : 15 ] And a few years ago they were on trial for the SAS and they were on a test march on the Brecon beacons and the temperatures soared and other candidates collapsed and had to be helped by civilians.

And these three young men died just on an exercise in Wales. And there were inquiries about what an awful thing to happen.

Just in a military exercise in Wales, three of the best soldiers in the British army died. And you think, what a tragic waste. Well, that's the kind of thing going on here.

24 young men in Israel, immensely fit, strong men, with all that potential. They probably had families back home and they should be on the same team. This is meant to be the United Kingdom of Israel.

And they kill each other in a game that goes horribly wrong. Abner and Joab, they think they're wise enough to establish God's kingdom. They are not wise enough.

[ 12 : 13 ] And the truth is that none of us is. None of us is wise enough to bring heaven on earth, God's kingdom on earth. We see that repeated all over the world. Just last week I was talking to a guy who's Iraqi in Glasgow and he was saying to me that he'd had some racial abuse and some woman was saying to him, go back to your own country.

And he said, I said to her, when you guys sort out the mess you've made of my country, I'll go back home. And it wasn't exactly good before, was it? Before the war in Iraq. And we see that kind of unsolvable mess around the world, don't we?

In Syria, in South Sudan, all over the world. And we shouldn't be surprised by that because when you have a world that has rejected the reign of God's king, Jesus, it's chaos.

So there's a hostile game that can't be controlled. And then what follows is a deadly chase that can't be stopped. It starts with a summary in verse 17. The battle that day was very fierce and Abner and the Israelites were defeated by David's men.

And then we're introduced to our three musketeers. Joab is with his two brothers, Abishai and Asahel. So these guys are the heroes, one for all and all for one.

[ 13 : 32 ] And they're furious with Abner's idiotic idea that has led to their friends being killed in this game. And so they chase. They won't go back to David and ask David what they should do.

He's the king. They won't inquire of the Lord like David did in chapter two, verse one. No, they think they can do it on their own. They can bring God's justice themselves. Verse 18.

Now Asahel was as fleet-footed as a wild gazelle. There's such fondness in the way it's written that. He chased Abner, turning neither to the right nor to the left as he pursued him.

So it's a bit like something in the Bourne movies. You know, you get these big chases in the Bourne films. Here is Asahel directing every ounce of his fury at catching up with Abner to teach him a lesson.

But Abner knows it's going to end badly. So he warns Asahel twice. You can picture them kind of pausing for breath in the chase, shouting to each other through the woods.

[ 14 : 31 ] And Abner's calling out to him. First in verse 21, he says, pick on someone who's a better match for you. Turn aside to the right or to the left. Then verse 22.

Again, Abner warned Asahel, stop chasing me. Why should I strike you down? How could I look your brother Joab in the face? Isn't that interesting?

He knows him. He expects to see Joab again. They've known each other for years, these men. They fought together. They're meant to be fellow countrymen on the same side.

How has it come to this? And not just in any nation. This is Israel. Remember, God's plan for Israel is they will live such good godly lives that the nations will see Israel and want to know God.

It's a mess. Asahel keeps chasing. So Abner, the experienced soldier, tries this old trick. He lets Asahel get close enough. And then he suddenly stops and his spear is pointed back.

[ 15 : 37 ] Verse 23. But Asahel refused to give up the pursuit. So Abner thrust the butt of his spear into Asahel's stomach and the spear came out through his back. He fell there and died on the spot.

And every man stopped when he came to the place where Asahel had fallen and died. I don't know if you've seen the Godfather trilogy. There's a moment in it when, in the third movie, all the families who are all from Sicily and they're in New York, and they've all been at war with each other.

And Michael Corleone, he pulls the families together and he says, how has it come to this? You can imagine every Israelite soldier thinking something like that as they passed by their fastest soldier, their young hero, and he so needlessly lost his life.

He's been killed by another Israelite. How has it come to this? But the fighting rages on. Our third point is a family tragedy can't be avoided.

The brothers want revenge. Verse 24. But Joab and Abishai pursued Abner and as the sun was setting, they came to the hill of Amar near Gibeon on the way to the wasteland of Gibeon.

[ 16 : 51 ] Then the men of Benjamin rallied behind Abner. They formed themselves into a group and took their stand on top of a hill. So it's a standoff and it's Abner who holds out the olive branch.

Abner called out to Joab, must the sword devour forever? Don't you realize that this will end in bitterness? How long before you order your men to stop pursuing their brothers?

It's their brothers. The language is of family. They're all descended from Abraham. The same blood. And that blood is now strewn across the valleys. So Joab responds in verse 27.

So the dark day of fighting is over, but untold harm has already been done.

We see that in verse 30. Then Joab returned from pursuing Abner and assembled all his men. Besides Asahel, 19 of David's men were found missing.

[ 18 : 02 ] But David's men had killed 360 Benjaminites who were with Abner. This is a family feud. Judah and Benjamin are the closest tribes to each other in the family of Israel, Abraham's family.

And 379 brave warriors are dead. So folks, this is what the world looks like when God's king is ignored and rejected.

That's the message for us today. And we see that all over our society today. I don't know if you're watching the TV series Collateral at the moment, Netflix and BBC high-profile drama series written by David Hare.

Final part this week is a detective story. So the plot is just, it's about a pizza delivery guy from the Middle East and he gets shot on the streets of London. But what's striking about the thriller is that David Hare has written a thriller where the institutions you would expect to bring justice in our country are all hopelessly corrupt and flawed.

He's playing on the suspicions of our times. So you've got this immigrant, an asylum seeker, they go to find his sisters to tell them that their brother has been killed and they're living in a garage in the freezing cold.

[ 19 : 20 ] He's escaped on a boat into Europe and that's the life he's had and he's been shot dead on the streets of London. There's an army officer in it and so you look at the army, the army officer pulled the trigger.

She killed him. She was a sniper, a hit man, hit girl and you find out that the reason she's disillusioned with the army is because of the sexual harassment she's receiving in the armed forces.

An ex-soldier is also responsible for some of the human trafficking. There's an MP in it and you think, oh well maybe politics is the answer. Maybe the politicians can help get justice for this family but the MP, he's only interested in his own reputation because he's involved in it and they're going to find out, the media, that his ex-wife gets drugs from this pizza company so he's just trying to cover his back.

Then the detective keeps getting hauled in by a boss because he's embarrassed about how is this going to look to the media. All the police want to do is save their own reputation, protect their own backs. Then there's the church, a vicar.

She's in a relationship with a woman. She's committed fraud on the immigration forms to keep this woman in the UK. Her bishop comes to see her. He says, look, you shouldn't, I don't care how you live as long as nobody knows.

[ 20 : 41 ] I've got a boyfriend but nobody knows. It doesn't matter what you do as long as nobody knows about it. She says, who cares what I do in private because there's recreational drugs and all sorts of stuff.

Who cares what I do in private because I'm helping the poor in my soup kitchen. The image is the church is terribly hypocritical and corrupt.

They are no help to you at all. So obviously in the drama, in lots of ways, it's an unfair picture but why is collateral doing that on TV today? I don't think a generation ago those institutions will be portrayed like that in a drama.

But in Britain, conscious of the injustice people are facing, we have lost confidence in our society. We've lost confidence in our institutions to put things right.

That's what David Hare is displaying for us in collateral. But of course, the answer then, what's the answer? Well, people will come to us, people will come to you and give you a new political cause.

[ 21 : 45 ] They'll say, this is the answer. New socialism. New conservatism. Throw your weight behind that and we'll put society right. And we need to be real as Christians.

Ultimately, this is a world that needs God's king to be reigning. And until we let Jesus reign, we will be in a mess. Secularism says we don't need Jesus.

We can delete him from the public square and rely on shared values. But our society is fractured and it's fragmented. We don't agree on those values anymore.

Once you move away from Jesus and the values he gives us of love for enemies and decency and honesty and tolerance, once you move away from him, we don't agree on our values anymore.

We're fragmented. We've got the same problem that Abner had. We want the kingdom of God but we don't want to be challenged by God's king. Like our own city, Glasgow, you know, having the motto let Glasgow flourish through the preaching of thy word and the praising of thy name changed to let Glasgow flourish.

[ 22 : 55 ] We want the Garden of Eden, we just don't want God. And as Christians, we need to recover our confidence as we speak to friends that what everyone around us really needs is God's righteous king reigning.

We need to listen to him and we see that in Israel's history on this horrible day. This is what life is like when you reject God's king. It hasn't got this bad yet in Britain because we're still living with the relics of a biblical worldview.

But what's true for society is also true for us personally as well. Every time we sin, every time we give into temptation, we believe the lie that my life is better if Jesus isn't reigning over it.

This bit of my life, this particular area, it's better if Jesus isn't in charge of that bit. I believe that what will make me happy is to indulge my own selfishness when in truth if I do that I will end up a very boring person and I'll still be dissatisfied.

So we need the saving reign of Jesus. We need to put to death our sin which is so bad for us and ask more and more for his reign in our hearts.

[ 24 : 12 ] Abner, Joseph, Joab, Abner and Abishai, they're lost without God's king and the same is true for us. But wonderfully, there are signs already in this chapter that we're in a much better position than they ever were.

The episode finishes in verse 32 with them going to Asahel's father's tomb at Bethlehem and then they march all night to arrive at Hebron where David is.

Two places that give us hope. Hebron, where David is, is Abraham's town and God has put David there to remind us that he has promised that he will bless the world through his appointed king.

The promises he made to Abraham will be fulfilled as his king comes to reign. That's why David's at Hebron and then they take Asahel's body to be buried in Bethlehem and that's the town of David and a thousand years later, a new king will be born in that same town.

In 1 Corinthians 1 we hear that Christ, that king, Jesus, is the power of God and the wisdom of God. So we see this morning that Abner and Joab, they're not wise enough to bring the kingdom of God and we see in Jesus that he gives us the wisdom of God in the cross to establish his reign and Asahel, he wasn't powerful enough to bring the kingdom of God but Jesus brought in God's kingdom through the power of the cross defeating the devil.

[ 25 : 46 ] So in Jesus, God has now given us the king that we need and God asks us to make our priorities his priorities. Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and trust that all the other things we need will be added to us.

Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we're so sorry for the ways that we forget how much we need you.

Thank you for opening our eyes to the horrific mess we would be in without you as we see Israel struggle on and turn in on itself in today's messy story.

And thank you that you graciously invite us to turn back to you that in Jesus' death for us on the cross we can come under his reign and be saved.

So as we look back at the war between the house of David and the house of Saul, we ask that you will burn that carnage onto our minds and hearts so that we cling to you and set our hope on you and let our lives revolve around you.

[ 26 : 54 ] That we would seek first your kingdom and your righteousness for our good and for your glory. Amen.