

12. Your Kingdom Come

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Date: 13 November 2011

Preacher: Bob Fyall

[0 : 00] Now, we're going to come to our reading, which is in 2 Samuel in the Old Testament, and it's on page 255. We're continuing this series in the life of David.

Last week we saw the tragic story of how King Saul and his sons had been killed by the Philistines, and David had spoken of this eloquently and powerfully in that great lament at the end of 2 Samuel chapter 1.

But although Saul has gone, David is still very far from the throne. That's what we're going to be reading about tonight. 2 Samuel chapter 2, verse 1, and we'll read the whole chapter.

After this, that's the events I've just mentioned, David inquired of the Lord, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?

And the Lord said to him, Go up. David said, To which shall I go? And the Lord said, To Hebron. So David went up there, and his two wives also, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel.

[1 : 13] And David brought up his men who were with him, everyone with his household, and they lived in the towns of Hebron. And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah.

When they told David, it was the men of Jabesh-Gilead who buried Saul. David sent messengers to the men of Jabesh-Gilead and said to them, May you be blessed by the Lord, because you showed this loyalty to Saul, your Lord, and buried him.

Now may the Lord show steadfast love and faithfulness to you. And I will do good to you, because you have done this thing. Now therefore, let your hands be strong and be valiant, for Saul, your Lord, is dead.

And the house of Judah has anointed me king over them. But Abner, the son of Ner, commander of Saul's army, took Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim.

And he made him king over Gilead and the Asherites and Jezreel and Ephraim and Benjamin and all Israel. Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, was forty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years.

[2 : 28] But the house of Judah followed David. And the time David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months.

Abner, the son of Ner, and the servants of Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon. And Joab, the son of Zeruiah, and the servants of David, went out and met them at the pool of Gibeon.

And they sat down, the one on the one side of the pool and the other on the other side of the pool. And Abner said to Joab, let the young men arise and compete before us.

And Joab said, let them arise. Then they arose and passed over by number, twelve for Benjamin and Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, and twelve for the servants of David.

And each got his opponent by the head and thrust his sword in his opponent's side. So they fell down together. Therefore that place was called Helcath-Hazurim, which is at Gibeon.

[3 : 28] And the battle was very fierce that day. And Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David. And the three sons of Zeruiah were there, Joab, Abishai, and Asahel.

Now Asahel was as swift of foot as a wild gazelle. And Asahel pursued Abner. And as he went, he turned neither to the right hand nor to the left from following Abner.

Then Abner looked behind him and said, is it you, Asahel? And he answered, it is I. Abner said to him, turn aside to your right hand or to your left and seize one of the young men and take his spoil.

But Asahel would not turn aside from following him. And Abner said again to Asahel, turn aside from following me. Why should I strike you to the ground? How then could I lift up my face to your

brother Joab?

But he refused to turn aside. Therefore Abner struck him in the stomach with the butt of his spear so that the spear came out at his back. And he fell there and died where he was.

[4 : 33] And all who came to the place where Asahel had fallen and died stood still. But Joab and Abishai pursued Abner. And as the sun was going down, they came to the hill of Amma, which lies before Gibeon, on the way to the wilderness of Gibeon.

And the people of Benjamin gathered themselves together behind Abner and became one group and took their stand on the top of a hill. And Abner called to Joab, shall the sword devour forever? Do you not know that the end will be bitter? How long will it be before you tell your people to turn from the pursuit of their brothers? And Joab said, as God lives, if you had not spoken, surely the men would not have given up the pursuit of their brothers until the morning.

So Joab blew the trumpet and all the men stopped and pursued Israel no more, nor did they fight any more. And Abner and his men went all that night through the Arabah.

They crossed the Jordan and marching the whole morning they came to Mahanaim. Joab returned from the pursuit of Abner. And when he had gathered all the people together, they were missing from David's servants, 19 men besides Asahel.

[5 : 47] But the servants of David had struck down of Benjamin 360 of Abner's men. And they took up Asahel and buried him in the tomb of his father, which was at Bethlehem.

And Joab and his men marched all night, and the day broke upon them at Hebron. And we'll just read the first verse of chapter 3. There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David.

And David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker. This is the word of the Lord, and may he bless it to us.

Now, if you could please have your Bibles open at page 255, 2 Samuel 2. And we'll have a moment of prayer as we ask the Lord's help to understand this.

Come then with prayer and contemplation. See how in Scripture Christ is known. As we read this old story, with all its details of fights and squabbles, as we watch the tangled way by which David, the Lord's anointed, made his way to the throne.

[7 : 05] Help us to look more deeply into that and see not just David, the Lord's anointed, but David's greater son, who already reigns in heaven and earth, and will one day reign publicly and be acknowledged by all.

This is our prayer, Lord, that you will indeed open our eyes to see him beyond the sacred page. We ask this in his name. Amen.

Amen. I think there can be few greater frustrations in life than completing a task, a delicate, difficult, perhaps complicated one, and then discovering we've got to do the whole thing over again.

Many of you, if you've wrestled with the stuff that comes from Ikea and B&Q, will be very familiar with such an experience. It is a great frustration.

And of course, that's a trivial example, but it does often happen in life. It happens that somebody who is clearly fitted out for a particular place waits year upon year upon year before that opening comes.

[8 : 27] And this is what's happening here. David, the Lord's anointed, is still struggling to find the throne ready for him.

Because although Saul is dead, although the Philistines have departed, there are still problems. And these problems center around this man Abner, verse 8, but Abner, the son of Ner, commander of Saul's army.

Indeed, he is probably Saul's cousin. If you read in 1 Samuel 14, it's not entirely easy to disentangle the relationships. But he's not only Saul's former commander, he's Saul's relative.

And the kingdom is coming so slowly and so painfully. Indeed, at first sight, it seems as if the long struggles and battles that we looked at in earlier weeks in the second part of 1 Samuel, as if they've achieved virtually nothing.

So what's actually happening here? Now, God's anointed is establishing his kingdom, and this is being opposed by another kingdom.

[9 : 34] Now, when we read this, this is the kind of passage, if you're not familiar with the Old Testament, you might well read this and say, well, this is an exciting story about 12 guys fighting each other, then a battle and a chase and all the rest of it.

But what on earth has it got to say to us today? Well, the point is, this is not just ancient history. Today, the Lord's anointed is establishing his kingdom.

That kingdom, indeed, has already come. But only one day will it come fully. When Jesus Christ, the Lord's anointed, great David's greater son, came into the world and met and dealt the devil a death blow by his cross and resurrection, the kingdom had already come.

But its fullness is still to be awaited for. That's why the sermon title this evening is, Your Kingdom Come.

What do we mean when we pray, Your Kingdom Come? Because we're not simply talking about David's kingdom coming, we're talking about the kingdom of God coming in the world.

[10:50] As the story develops, there are really three acts, if you like, in this drama. Three chapters, two of them quite short, but very, very packed chapters, and one of them longer.

So we're going to look, first of all, at the patience of the true king. Verse 1 to verse 4e, down to the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah.

Saul has gone, as I say, but David is still far from the throne. He knows it is his, but he won't move without the Lord's guidance.

First of all, when to move, and secondly, where to move. See, a promise of God doesn't take away the need of faith. The fact that we know the kingdom will come does not make the life of faith easy, because there is so much in this world that seems to contradict the fact that the kingdom will ever come.

The promises of God still need faith. We still need to stand on those promises. They don't remove the need for living that way. And therefore, David turns to the Lord.

[12:00] He inquired of the Lord. Now, I know from earlier chapters, he had the priest Abiathar with him, who had given him guidance, and although it's not said here, almost certainly this is the means by which God spoke to him.

He's still in his desert stronghold of Ziklag, but now he's making a complete break with the old life. Now, some commentators, some commentators think totally misunderstanding.

They say David is running away from the Philistines. He's trying to get out of their sphere of influence. That's exactly what happened last week. The point is, if you look at verse 2, he takes his wives, his household, everybody.

He's not going back. This is not him dodging around. He is not going back. The break with the old life is to be complete.

Now, first of all, the significance of Hebron. Hebron was about 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem. Remember, until chapter 5, Jerusalem is not significant in the David story.

[13:05] It's only in chapter 5 that the citadel is taken from its inhabitants, the Jebusites. So, at this moment, Hebron is an important strategic center. About 3,000 miles above sea level.

Little pocket of country. Hebron and the towns around it. So, there is where the Lord's anointed is first crowned. And, you know, for much of the time, the kingdom of God is like that.

For much of the time, our efforts for the kingdom of God, our work in the world, seems so unimpressive. Little pockets of Christian influence surrounded by a whole sea of hostility.

But, you know, all over the country, all over the world, there are little Hebrons where people are converted, where people grow in grace, where people live for Jesus in the world.

And just as snowdrops in February show that the spring will come, So, the kingdom of God, even if it's on a tiny scale, like Hebron, is still there.

[14:14] Now, I think that's hugely important because it will save us from two wrong moves. One is it will save us from pride. It will save us from saying, we're really doing rather well, aren't we?

Our ministry is flourishing. Brothers and sisters, all ministry this side of heaven. It's not all that impressive.

It's only the grace of God. And we must never forget that. So, it will keep us from pride. It will also keep us from despair. From imagining the kingdom will never come.

We pray your kingdom come. Not hopelessly, not in a futile way. We pray knowing that that kingdom will come. So, there is the significance of Hebron here.

There's also the significance of the anointing. Men of Judah, anointed David, verse 4, king over the house of Judah. Now, David had already been anointed back in chapter 16.

[15:16] He'd been anointed by God through the prophet Samuel. Now, it's not that the men of Judah are, as it were, saying, oh, that anointing wasn't a real one. Let's give him a real one.

It was rather, they were underwriting their loyalty to David. They believed, they knew, that he was the Lord's anointed, and therefore, they wanted to be part of this kingdom.

Tiny and pathetic, as it seemed, they wanted to be part of this kingdom. And that's surely what happens when people come into the kingdom of God. What they are saying is, I want to be part of the kingdom of the Lord's anointed.

It may look small and unimpressive. It may look as if it's not going anywhere, but I want to live that way. I want to belong to the Lord and to his kingdom.

This is a very low-key passage. I don't approve of red-letter Bibles, by the way, where the words of Jesus are put in red, because all the words of the Bible, I believe, are the words of Jesus.

[16:22] If you don't have a red-letter passage, you do worse than this. The flag of the Lord's anointed has been planted in hostile territory. The king has been anointed, even although most people don't accept it.

So, this is the patience of the true king. The true king is the one who is prepared to wait. Secondly, we have the generosity of the true king.

Verses 4b-7. When they, not told who they were, but somebody told David, it was the men of Jabesh-Gilead who buried Saul. Now, back in chapter 31, the last chapter, one Samuel, which we read, I think, a week or so ago, we saw that how when Saul and the army were defeated by the Philistines, the Philistines took the bodies of Saul and his sons and hung them on the wall of the city of Beth-shan, degrading them, refusing them decent burial.

Now, the men of Jabesh-Gilead, at great risk to themselves, went by night and took down the bodies and gave them a decent burial. Because, long, long ago, in his younger, better days, in 1 Samuel 11, Saul had rescued the people of Jabesh-Gilead from the Ammonites, terrifying oppressors and cruel people, and they're repaying that loyalty.

Now, David applauds that. Remember, we've seen one of the ways in which David is fit to be king is he has no vindictiveness whatever towards Saul. He refused to take the chance to kill Saul.

[18:01] He was furious back in chapter 1 when someone else said they had killed him. David applauds their loyalty and appeals to that loyalty. What he's essentially saying is verse 6.

Now, may the Lord show steadfast love and faithfulness to you and I will do good to you. Saul is history, David is saying. Come and join me and I will do good to you.

Associate yourself with me, says David, for I am the future and Saul is the past. Now, David is a shrewd operator, obviously.

This is a very shrewd way to behave because if he can win over those who have been especially loyal to Saul, he's going to help him. Remember, there is no contradiction between believing faith and acting sensibly.

As Cromwell said, trust in God and keep your powder dry. That's what David is doing. David is acting sensibly. Saul's friends are still active and still threatening.

[19:06] It would have been risky for Jabesh Gilead to take sides with David at this moment, just as it is risky today to take sides with Christ when his kingdom is under attack.

That's why Jesus says to take up the cross. It's not easy. It's never going to be easy, but the cross will one day lead to the crown.

So you see, there are two kings and there are two kingdoms. And as we'll see in a moment or two, we can't be loyal to both. It seems to me these first few verses.

Verses one to seven are building up the picture of the man who is fit to be king. The man who will one day reign. The man who will not only win by might and by diplomacy, but the man who will win because he deserves to win.

He's the kind of man whom people can follow, whom people can love. Now the rest of the chapter, the third part, the enemies who oppose the true king.

[20:11] Verses eight to thirty-two. Now, as very often a series of events is being summarized here, we are told that verse eight, Abner took Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, and he places him on the throne.

We are told he reigned for two years and David reigned for seven years and six months. Now, it's not altogether easy to put these two time periods together.

It may well be that Abner spent five years drumming up support from Saul's demoralized followers. We don't need to worry too much about that. In fact, I suspect nobody was worrying about it at all until I pointed it out.

But there you go. I'm sure that's illuminated everything. What is really important is what the text is teaching us. What is this apparently simply adventure story telling us?

Well, it's first of all telling us that Abner is opposing the living God. He's not just opposing David. He is opposing the Lord's anointed and therefore he is opposing the living God.

[21 : 26] You would think he would have learned from the fate of Goliath. Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should come against the living God. He might have learned from the fate of Saul that he chooses not to.

And here he joins himself with the Herods and the Pilots of this world. We will not have this man to reign over us. With those in Psalm 2, the nations who rage and whom oppose God as he sets his king on the holy hill of Zion which is to happen later on of course in chapters 5 and 6.

Now, this guy, Ish-bosheth, was almost certainly a weakling whom Abner was going to manipulate. Why did Abner do it?

I want to suggest Abner did it because he loved the establishment, he loved traditions. That's what's happening today, isn't it? Church leaders setting aside the authority of King Jesus and replacing the authority of King public opinion.

King we know better. That's what's happening. We have a choice. We can't be loyal to both. We can't be loyal both to the kingdom which has been condemned and the kingdom which is to come.

[22 : 51] Abner will not. Abner looks at the situation around him. Saul's army has been defeated. Saul has been a desperately bad king at least during his later years and yet Abner is still determined that he's going to live under the reign of Saul or under the reign of Ish-bosheth.

That's the first thing. He opposes the Lord. Secondly, he tries to get his way by force. David in one of his Psalms talks about violent men who plan evil things in their heart and stir up war continually. Now that is the point of verse 12. They went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon. Now, Mahanaim involved a very long journey to the pool of Gibeon within five miles of Jerusalem.

Abner is clearly the aggressor here. He's not just come for a visit. He's not coming to exchange diplomatic niceties with David. He is coming as an aggressor attempting to destroy David's Judean kingdom.

Now, of course, we've noticed this before and we know this very well. In ancient times, God's people were a nation state as well as the people of God and they had to fight their enemies.

[24 : 13] That is, David had to fight as well. But Abner is deliberately provoking war and more than that, he wants to treat war as a game. Let's get 12 of our toughest lads from either side and they can fight a kind of contest.

Now, that contest does not work. That contest ends in disaster. Verse 16, each caught his opponent by the head and thrust his sword in his opponent's side so they fell down together.

Verse 12 against 12 simply fails and there emerges a full-scale battle and Abner, the men of Israel, were beaten before the servants of David.

As I've said already, this is a clear rerun of the Goliath story in many ways. Goliath as a champion. Let's each get a champion who will fight and then we'll decide the battle on that.

Abner tries to do that here as well. You see what kingdom Abner belongs to. Abner belongs to the kingdom which opposes everything that God is doing.

[25 : 28] And then the three sons of Zeruiah were there, Joab, Abishai and Asahel. Joab is David's commander and Zeruiah by the way is David's sister.

You read that in 1 Chronicles which of course would make Joab David's nephew presumably. But it's difficult once again to work out all these guys married so many people.

It's all difficult to work out the family trees but at least Joab is related. Joab and Abner are men of the same kind. They are men who delight in war and in violence and I suppose you can say well they're army commanders they've got to be skillful at war.

That's true. But there is in both of them a ruthlessness and a determination. First of all we feel a little sympathy for Abner perhaps Asahel the third son of Zeruiah as fleet of foot as a wild gazelle verse 19 he pursued Abner as he went he turned neither to the right hand nor to the left.

Asahel is somebody who is going to be undone by his strength. Just as much later on in the story David's own son Absalom is going to come to a similar fate.

[26 : 48] Now Abner is a shrewd man. Abner says verse 22 why should I strike to the ground? How then could I lift up my face to your brother Job? Abner has no real respect for Asahel but he's a healthy respect for Job and he is no doubt realizing that Job's fury will come upon him which is what

is going to happen in the next chapters.

Now I think we're going to misunderstand this story though if we're going to try and paint Abner as a kind of goody who got himself caught up in this. In verse look at verse 26 Abner called to Job shall the sword devour forever?

Do you not know that the end will be bitter? How long will it be? For you tell your people to turn from the pursuit of their brothers. We noticed in earlier studies that Saul, Abner's former leader, was a man very fond of pious language.

He used all the language of piety but didn't have any of the godliness of heart that went with that kind of language.

Because if you look at verse 27, Job said, as God lives, if you had not spoken, surely these men would have not given up the pursuit of their brothers until the morning.

[28 : 12] That verse could be translated, and I think better translated is this, if you, Job says to Abner, if you had not proposed a contest this morning, there would have been no need for battle at all.

Now you see what's happening. Abner is determined to get his way by force. He's been unable to do so, tried the contest, then tried the battle, and then kills Asahel.

But Abner is one who takes the sword and is going to perish by the sword. Abner, opposing God's king, trying to get his way by force.

But the third thing, and we'll come to this in a couple of weeks' time, Abner is doing all this deliberately. Because Abner knows very well that David is the Lord's anointed.

Over in chapter 3, then Abner said, to this day I keep steadfast love to the house of Saul, and have not given you into the hand of David.

[29 : 19] And later on, the Lord has sworn to transfer the kingdom to David. Abner is not ignorant.

Abner is setting up something in deliberate opposition to the word of God. He's not just setting up a rival king. He is setting up a rival type of kingdom.

When David comes to the throne, David reigns by the word of God. There is a terrible, terrible story of David and Bathsheba, which we'll come to later on.

But if you read the whole story, particularly read the end of David's story, you'll discover David's loyalty and faithfulness to the Lord. Abner, however, wants to set up a kingdom where the Lord will not be worshipped, where his word will not be obeyed.

In other words, a very different kind of kingdom. You know, as we look around us today, at the church and at the world, it's difficult not to see the same kind of thing happening.

[30 : 30] See, once we abandon our loyalty to the word of God, once we start picking and choosing which bits we like, which bits we don't like, once we start saying, the Lord, it may have been all right at one time, but the Spirit's leading us into different truth, then we are taking sides with Abner.

We are taking sides against the Lord's anointed, disobeying the word of the Lord. So Abner takes the initiative. Abner tries to get his way by force and Abner wants to take the people of God away from the worship of the Lord, away from their faithfulness to his word.

And like all who oppose the Lord's kingdom, he's not going to succeed. This story is so much to say to us. We're in Hebron at the moment for the most part, aren't we?

Little pockets of the Lord's kingdom, little shoots springing up through the barren and frosty ground, and yet there is life there, and one day it's going to flourish.

We are those who experience the generosity of the true king. This great word in verse 6, may the Lord show steadfast love, the great Hebrew word heseth, undeserved covenant love, and grace.

[31 : 55] And we need to choose. Just as Moses said long before, I set before you life and death, blessing and cursing, therefore choose life.

That's what that story is saying to us. Choose to follow the true king and choose life. Amen. Let's pray. Praise be to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Father, in this battle of the kingdoms, help us indeed to be on the side of the true king, and to look forward to the day when that kingdom will come and when his will will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

And we ask this in his name. Amen.