

# 13. Nothing can stop the Kingdom

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're going to turn now to our reading today, and Bob is continuing his series in 2 Samuel. We're going to read 2 Samuel chapter 3 and 4. We'll divide it into two parts and sing in between, because it's a long reading.

But first then, it's 2 Samuel chapter 3, which you'll find if you have one of our visitor's Bibles on page 256. I'm going to read up to verse 30 of chapter 3 in this first section.

There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker.

Sons were born to David at Hebron. His firstborn was Ammon of Ahinarum of Jezreel, and his second Chiliab of Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel, and the third Absalom, the son of Makkah, the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur, and the fourth Adonijah, the son of Hagith, and the fifth Shephethiah, the son of Abital, and the sixth Ithriam of Eglah, David's wife.

These were born to David in Hebron. While there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner was making himself strong in the house of Saul.

[ 1 : 27 ] Now Saul had a concubine whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah. And Ish-bosheth said to Abner, Why have you gone into my father's concubine? And Abner was very angry over the words of Ish-bosheth, and said, Am I a dog's head of Judah?

To this day I keep showing steadfast love to the house of Saul, your father, to his brothers, and to his friends, and have not given you into the hand of David.

And yet you charge me today with a fault concerning a woman. God do so to Abner, and more also, if I do not accomplish for David what the Lord has sworn to him, to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul, and set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan to Beersheba. And Ish-bosheth could not answer Abner another word, because he feared him. And Abner sent messengers to David on his behalf, saying, To whom does the land belong?

Make your covenant with me, and behold, my hand shall be with you to bring over all Israel to you. And he said, Good, I will make a covenant with you. But one thing I require of you, that is, you shall not see my face unless you first bring Michael, Saul's daughter, when you come to see my face.

[ 2 : 46 ] Then David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, saying, Give me my wife, Michael, for whom I paid the bridal price of a hundred foreskins of the Philistines. And Ish-bosheth sent, and took her from her husband Paltiel, the son of Laish.

But her husband went with her, weeping after her all the way to Bahurim. Then Abner said to him, Go, return. And he returned. And Abner conferred with the elders of Israel, saying, For some time past you have been seeking David as king over you.

Now then bring it about. For the Lord has promised David, saying, By the hand of my servant David I will save my people Israel from the hand of the Philistines and from the hand of all their enemies.

Abner also spoke to Benjamin. And then Abner went to tell David at Hebron all that Israel and the whole house of Benjamin thought good to do. When Abner came with twenty men to David at Hebron, David made a feast for Abner and the men who were with him.

And Abner said to David, I will arise and go and will gather all Israel to my lord the king that they may make a covenant with you and that you may reign over all that your heart desires.

[ 3 : 58 ] So David sent Abner away and he went in peace. Just then the servants of David arrived with Joab from a raid, bringing much spoil with them. But Abner was not with David at Hebron for he had sent him away and he had gone in peace.

When Joab and all the army that was with him came, it was told Joab, Abner the son of Ner came to see the king and he has let him go and he has gone in peace. Then Joab went to the king and said, What have you done?

Behold, Abner came to you. Why is it that you have sent him away so that he is gone? You know that Abner the son of Ner came to deceive you and to know you are going out and you are coming in and to know all that you are doing.

And Joab came out from David's presence. He sent messengers after Abner and they brought him back from the system of Syrah. But David did not know about it and when Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside into the midst of the gate to speak with him privately.

And there he struck him in the stomach so that he died for the blood of Ashel, his brother.

Afterward, when David heard of it, he said, I and my kingdom are forever guiltless before the Lord for the blood of Abner, the son of Ner.

[ 5 : 11 ] May it fall upon the head of Joab and upon all his father's house and may the house of Joab never be without one who has a discharge or who is leprous or who holds a spindle or who falls by the sword or who lacks bread.

So Joab and Abishai, his brother, killed Abner because he had put their brother Azahel to death in the battle at Gibeon. Then David said to Joab and to all the people who were with him, Tear your clothes and put on sackcloth and mourn for Abner.

And King David followed the bier. They buried Abner at Hebron and the king lifted up his voice and wept at the grave of Abner and all the people wept. And the king lamented for Abner saying, Should Abner die as a fool dies?

Your hands were not bound, your feet were not fettered. As one falls before the wicked, you have fallen. And all the people wept again over him. Then all the people came to persuade David to eat bread while it was yet day.

But David swore saying, God do so to me and more also if I taste bread or anything else till the sun goes down. And all the people took notice of it and it pleased them as everything that the king did pleased all the people.

[ 6 : 31 ] So all the people and all Israel understood that day that it had not been the king's will to put to death Abner the son of Ner. The king said to his servants, Do you not know that a prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel?

That I was gentle today, though anointed king. Then these men, the sons of Zeriaah, are more severe than I. The Lord repay the evildoer according to his wickedness.

When Ish-bosheth, Saul's son heard that Abner had died at Hebron, his courage failed and all Israel was dismayed. Now Saul's son had two men who were captains of raiding bands.

The name of the one was Banna, the name of the other Rechab, the sons of Rimen, a man of Benjam from Beroth. Beroth, also his counterpart of Benjamin, the Berothites fled to Gittim and have been sojourners there to this day.

Jonathan, the son of Saul, had a son who was crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel and his nurse took him up and fled and as she fled in her haste, he fell and became lame and his name was Mephibosheth.

[ 7 : 45 ] Now the sons of Rimen, the Berothite, Rechab and Banna set out and about the heat of the day they came to the house of Ish-bosheth as he was taking his noonday rest. They came into the midst of the house as if to get wheat and they stabbed him in the stomach.

Then Rechab and Banna, his brother, escaped. When they came into the house as he lay on his bed in his bedroom, they struck him and put him to death and beheaded him. And they took his head and went by the way of the Arba all night and brought the head of Ish-bosheth to David at Hebron.

And he said to the king, Here is the head of Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life. The Lord has avenged, my lord, the king this day on Saul and on his offspring. But David answered, Rechab and Banna, his brother, the sons of Rimen, the Berethite, as the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life out of every adversity.

When one told me, Behold, Saul is dead and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and killed him at Ziklag, which was the reward I gave him for his news. How much more when wicked men have killed a righteous man in his own house on his bed, shall I not now require his blood at your hand and destroy you from the earth?

And David commanded his young men and they killed them. Cut off their hands and feet and hanged them beside the pool at Hebron. But they took the head of Ish-bosheth and buried it in the tomb of Abner at Hebron.

[ 9 : 19 ] Amen. May God bless his word to us. And now, if we could have our Bibles open, please, at page 256 and we'll have a moment of prayer and ask the Lord's help.

Come then, with prayer and contemplation, see how in Scripture Christ is known. Father, as we read these strange and difficult and troubling words in the Old Testament, we pray that you will lead us to the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray that we will, in this earthly kingdom, see the coming of his heavenly kingdom and that our hearts will burn within us, that our eyes will be opened and be led out into the world to live more fully as citizens of that kingdom.

We ask this in his name. Amen. Amen. Many of you will have read *The Void of the Dawn Treader* and many of you will have seen the film and you may remember the striking opening sentence of that book.

There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrub and he almost deserved it. Very striking sentence indeed. Now, one of the less attractive qualities of Eustace Clarence Stub was to pontificate on things that he knew nothing about.

[ 10 : 54 ] And one day he was pontificating on astronomy, talking about stars, talking about planets, and he said this, a star is simply a mass of inert gas.

One of the wiser characters said to him, Eustace, even in your country, that's not what a star is. It's only what it's made of. Not what a star is, only what it's made of.

Now, that seems to me a good principle of interpretation when we come to a passage like this. Because what this passage is made of is not instantly attractive. We've got polygamy, we've got violence, we've got political maneuvering.

That's what the passage is made of. But what we're really interested in is what the passage is. What is this passage telling us? What is this passage saying to us in this day in which we live? Now, the clue, I think, is in chapter 3, verse 1. Because when we're reading the stories in the Old Testament and indeed in the New Testament, we've got to fit these into the big story.

[ 12 : 04 ] Ask ourselves, where are we in the big story that runs from the creation to the new creation? In chapter 3, verse 1, there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David.

And many of the incidents in that long war are described in this chapter. But, if we read this in the big picture, we realize that it's far more than war between warring tribes.

It's far more than violence in a remote country thousands of years ago. This is the great war which began in Genesis chapter 3, verse 15, when the Lord God said, the descendant of the woman will crush the head of the serpent.

I will put enmity, I will put war between you and the descendants of the serpent. Now, Saul had chosen the way of the serpent. He had chosen the way of the world.

He had chosen the kingdom of darkness rather than the kingdom of light. So, the kingdom here of David is not just the kingdom of David. It's the kingdom of his greater son.

[ 13 : 13 ] The kingdom which one day will come. The kingdom which already is reigning in hearts and lives. And the title today is *Nothing Can Stop the Kingdom*.

*Nothing Can Stop the Coming of the Kingdom of David's Greater Son*. Now, where do we fit in? Well, the church has prayed for centuries, sometimes publicly together, often privately.

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. There's two things we need to realize. First of all, that kingdom is going to come.

Nothing can stop it. That will prevent us from being totally depressed and discouraged. We will often get discouraged. We will often be disillusioned. Because often it seems as if the kingdom is making no headway at all.

You'll need to listen to the headlines. You'll need to look around at the state of the church and you'll wonder, will the kingdom ever come? So the first thing we need to realize is nothing can stop that kingdom.

[ 14 : 15 ] The kingdom will come. Christ will reign. Jesus will reign where the sun does its successive journeys run. But the point is, what is our part in that kingdom?

Indeed, which kingdom do we belong to? Are we members of that kingdom? Are we members of the kingdom of darkness? That kingdom will come.

Nothing can stop it. What I want to look at now is, what are the obstacles? And how do we handle them? Because there are many obstacles, many hindrances. The first thing I want to say is the

kingdom will not be stopped by the weakness of its servants.

See, verse 3, the kingdom was a long war. David grew stronger and stronger and the house of Saul became weaker and weaker. And then again in verse 6, there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David.

The eventual outcome is not in doubt, either in David's kingdom or in Christ's kingdom. What on earth is verses 2 to 5 about sons were born to David?

[ 15 : 24 ] Now, the first thing is David is being disobedient here. Deuteronomy 17, 17 says, the king shall not acquire many wives for himself.

And this is exactly what David is doing. David is adopting standards that are not kingdom standards. He is adopting standards that are not the standards of the book of Moses.

Genesis 2, one flesh. Now, how can you possibly one flesh with lots of people? David ought to have been the role model and here he is failing not only personally, but he is failing to be the role model to his people.

Now, you can make excuses for David here. It is rather like some of Abraham's activities. You read back in Genesis 25 and so on. And you can say both of them are trying to make sure that they are going to have sons so that the line of promise can continue.

That may well have been the case. They wanted sons. We need to guarantee the royal line will continue. And neither needed to, of course, because God had already provided the sons that would continue the royal line.

[ 16 : 41 ] It is always easy to use worldly methods to advance the kingdom. What we are doing isn't really succeeding. Nobody is interested in our preaching. Nobody wants to pray.

Nobody wants to do it the gospel way. Let's try worldly methods. Let's try methods that have proven success. Let's get huge crowds through worldly and ungodly methods.

No, it never works. Verse 2, his firstborn was Ammon. Now, if you read on, there's a sordid story in 2 Samuel 13 of how Ammon, this son, commits incest with his sister.

Mostly unedifying and terrifying story. And then down in verse 3, the third, Absalom, the son of Mecca. Absalom was the son who was going to try to destroy David and the kingdom.

God did not need a helping hand from David. And David was lapsing into unbiblical ways of behaving. As I say, the kingdom doesn't need a helping hand from us.

[ 17 : 50 ] But it's also, there's something deeper. Going back again to Genesis 3.15, this is one of the devil's attacks. The devil is determined to derail David, determined to destroy David.

The devil wants to prevent the king sitting in Zion, just as he wants to prevent King Jesus reigning over heaven and earth. He will destroy, he will corrupt, he will hinder in every possible way he can. But the wonderful truth is the gospel, the kingdom will not be stopped by the weaknesses of its servants. Grace is the way the kingdom will come.

Even someone like David will only win the kingdom and hold the kingdom by grace. As I said often, we are not David, but the principles apply.

We enter the kingdom by grace, we live in the kingdom by grace, and we will win a place eventually in that kingdom by grace alone.

[ 18 : 53 ] It's a challenge, of course, for us not to use worldly methods. It is also an encouragement, isn't it, even when we get it wrong, even when we go badly astray, that kingdom will still come.

The kingdom will not be stopped by the weakness of its servants. Secondly, the kingdom will not be stopped by political maneuvering.

These verses 6 to 30, which are dominated by Abner. Now, Abner was Saul's former commander, and he had been manipulating events ever since Saul's death.

Abner is the kind of man who wants to have the kingdom come by cheating and by manipulating.

He thinks that if he controls the politics, if he pulls the strings, then everything will dance to his tune.

So, first of all, as we saw the last time, you put this man Ish-bosheth in as a puppet king. And now he's going to dump him. Verse 8, then Abner was very angry over the words of Ish-bosheth and said, Am I a dog's head of Judah?

[ 20 : 03 ] To this day I kept showing steadfast love to the house of Saul, your father, his brothers, his friends, and have not given you to the hand of David. And yet today you charge with a fault concerning a woman.

God does do so to Abner and more also. If I do not accomplish for David what the Lord has sworn for him to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and set up the throne of David.

you see what Abner is saying, Abner is saying, only if I control events, only if I'm the top person, is the kingdom actually going to come.

I'll put the kingdom into David's hand. Ish-bosheth, you're useless, you've proved a huge disappointment, I'm going to transfer my allegiance to David.

And it's a very disheartening passage, this. David, of course, is no fool, and David does not negotiate with Abner, he negotiates with Ish-bosheth, the king, and he asks also for his wife, Michal, verse 13, to be sent back, Saul's daughter.

[ 21 : 18 ] This is a very poignant little scene, verse 16, her husband went with her, weeping after her all the way to Behurim, in the cold, heartless world of politics, there's very little room for personal feelings.

You see, this is the kind of world, this is the kind of kingdom that would exist if Abner got his way. Abner is out for himself.

The kingdom he wants, it's his own kingdom, he doesn't want the Lord's kingdom, he wants a kingdom where he will be the top dog. He puts Ish-bosheth on the throne because he knows he can manipulate him.

Look what he says to David in verse 12. Abner sent messengers to David, to whom does the land belong?

Make your covenant with me, and behold my hand shall be with you to bring over all Israel to you. In other words, David, all Israel is in my gift.

[ 22 : 24 ] If you listen to me, then I'll give you the kingdom. Difficult not to flash ahead a thousand years and hear the words, all the kingdoms of the world I will give to you if you bow down and worship me.

Abner wants to manipulate David into position where David is clay in his hands. surely that's been a picture of so much of manoeuvring in the church these days.

People wanting a kingdom of their own. David, you need me. The kingdom is not going to come without me. I'm a politician who will deliver it into your hands.

David, of course, is far too shrewd to be taken in by Abner, but so often this happens. It's often seen this in church, that people will only be part of something if they can be top.

They won't serve the Lord unless they're the one who can actually be the one who manipulates, who pulls the strings. The spirit of Abner is alive and well in the church.

[ 23 : 35 ] It's alive and well in our own hearts. Another unattractive feature of all this is that Abner uses the language of piety. Verse 18. Verse 17.

First, Abner conferred the elders of Israel saying, For some time past you have been seeking David as king over you. Now then, bring it about, for the Lord has promised David, saying, By the hand of my servant David, I will save my people Israel from the hand of the Philistines and from all their enemies.

Abner also spoke to Benjamin and Abner went to tell David at Hebron all that Israel and the whole house of Benjamin thought good to do. Now, if the Lord had promised David the kingdom which he had, then it didn't need Abner's manipulations to bring it about.

It reminds me very much of that sinister character in Acts chapter 8, Simon Magus. Simon who, when he saw the miracles, when he saw the power of the apostles, apostles, he wanted to have a part of it.

He wanted to be in on the act. Always easy to talk the gospel talk, but we need to be alert to the Abner in us and the Abners among us.

[ 24 : 53 ] The word of the Lord needs to be our guide. We don't need Abner to give us the kingdom. We mustn't listen to those who manipulate the word of God, who want honored places and who want popularity.

It's the very opposite of grace, isn't it? If grace is going to come, if grace is going to, sorry, if the kingdom is going to come by grace, then it's going to come in God's way and in God's time.

The trouble about Abner is Abner is a totally unreliable man, isn't he? You never know whether Abner is on your side or not, or whether he's against you. It's rather like the story of the young politician who had made his way to the front bench and was sitting on the front bench for the first time and he said to a veteran sitting beside him, it's great to be sitting where I can look the enemy in the eye.

The veteran politician says, son, these are not your enemies, these are your opponents, your enemies are on the benches around you and behind you. You know the case so often in the church, our enemies are on the benches around us and behind us.

We don't need Abner or the spirit of Abner to bring the kingdom. The kingdom will not come this way. The kingdom will come by the promise and by the grace of God.

[ 26 : 22 ] Our own weaknesses will not prevent the kingdom coming. I find that so encouraging because so often we imagine we're doing rather well and then we look into our own hearts and realize that not only are we not doing well, we are complete failures so often inside.

If the kingdom is going to come by us, then the kingdom isn't going to last even if it were to come. And then we stop by those who maneuver for their own gain, those who try to give themselves honored places.

And thirdly, it's not going to come by violence either. That seems to be the point from verses 26 onwards to the end of chapter 4. We have two grim acts of violence, the killing of Abner and the killing of Ish-bosheth at the hand of Joab.

The problem is Joab underneath is the same kind of man as Abner. Abner is shrewder, Abner is more polished, Abner is more ready to try to get his way by manipulation.

Joab is a straight, blunt, military man. Probably he is afraid that Abner is going to usurp him as commander. Now, the interesting thing about Joab, as we read his story in 1 and 2 Samuel, there's quite a bit about him.

[ 27 : 55 ] Obviously, he admired David. Probably he admired him from back in 1 Samuel 17. He admired this young man who had overcome the giant and restored the morale to Israel.

As a military man, he enjoyed seeing another champion. But it is fascinating that he's not mentioned in 2 Samuel 23 in the list of David's champions.

Joab, it doesn't rate a mention there. I think there's a very important thing about Joab. Joab was loyal to David, at least when it suited him, but he did not love David's God.

There is nothing in the recorded story of Joab that talks about him praying, there's nothing that talks about him humbling himself. Joab was a man who believed the kingdom will come if I fight hard enough, if I'm strong enough, if I get rid of enough people.

Eugene Peterson, in his short but very fine commentary on 2 Samuel, says, in the midst of war, David is not defined by war.

[ 29 : 08 ] David is a strong champion, a strong warrior, as we know, but unlike Joab, he is not simply a man of violence. Look at the end of chapter 3, verse 39.

I was gentle today, though anointed king. These men, the sons of Zeruiah, that's the Joab and his brother, are more severe than I, are harder than I.

Joab was a man who was simply callous, a man to whom human life was cheap. Then, of course, there's the killing of Ish-bosheth, which David repudiates as he does the killing of Abner.

Violence will not bring the kingdom. Now, I said at the beginning about the weaknesses of David, and they're obvious. We can't ignore them, and in due course, we'll come to these terrible chapters, chapters 11 and 12, Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite.

But in these chapters, there is something else happening. God is preparing the man who is fit to be king, the man who is going to reign, king, the man whose heart was always faithful to the Lord his God, even in his failures.

[ 30 : 28 ] It's not said about between 1 Kings 11, in contrast to his son Solomon. Solomon's heart was not truly devoted to the Lord his God, the way that the heart of his father David had been.

Here is a man who is fit to be king, a man who is gentle, verse 39, a man who, while he can be a great warrior, is a man who is gentle, caring.

Notice once again, as he had lamented Saul and Jonathan back in chapter 1, now he laments Abner, verse 33 of chapter 3.

Should Abner die as a fool dies? Your hands were not bound, your feet were not fettered, as one falls before the wicked you have fallen. You can see his generosity of spirit here, as he showed in Saul as well.

He recognized that behind all the scheming, behind all the cheating and lying of Abner, there was ultimately a man who could have been different. Your hands were not bound, feet were not fettered, and yet you died as a fool.

[ 31 : 34 ] It's amazing generosity of spirit. The Lord's anointed, whom the Lord is preparing his reign, a man of generosity, sense of waste, and then in chapter four, the condemnation and the execution of Ish-bosheth's killers.

David will not allow violence to be at the heart of his rise to the throne. Just as he refused to kill Saul himself, the Lord's anointed, so now he condemns those who killed this other man, Ish-bosheth, even if he was undeserving.

But I think the real key to what's happening here is in chapter four, verse nine. These guys, Rechab and Banna, brought the head of Ish-bosheth to David at Hebron, and they said to the king, here is the head of Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life.

The Lord has avenged my lord, the king, this day, on Saul and his offspring. That's how readily they assume, but because they've done it, the Lord has done it. But, this is the verse, David answered, Rechab and Banna, his brother, the sons of Rimmon and the Beirothite, as the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life out of every adversity.

David knows that he will come to the throne as a result of the Lord, who has redeemed his life out of every adversity. David is saying, you men have taken the law of God into your own hands.

[ 33 : 09 ] You've manipulated the law, you've violated the law, you've committed murder. I'm trusting in the Lord who has redeemed my life out of every adversity.

Now, we are not David, but surely that is something. It would be a general promise to all of God's people. As we wait for the coming of the kingdom, as we try to live as citizens of the kingdom in this world, the Lord who has redeemed my life out of every adversity.

This is a gospel verse, isn't it? He's redeemed us, first of all, in the sense of redeeming us from the darkness of our sins, which brought us eternal judgment.

And since then, he's kept on redeeming us through our mistakes, through our follies, through our failures. The hand of God has redeemed our lives.

God has been in the next chapter we'll see next week, is going to enthrone David in Zion as king over all Israel. This is the God whose greater son one day will be enthroned in heaven and earth.

[ 34 : 23 ] This son who has opened the kingdom of heaven to all who believe. The kingdom cannot be stopped. Not stopped by our failures, not stopped by political manipulations, not brought about by violence.

And yet, this God is our God and as we wait for his kingdom, let us trust in him, let us believe in him, and let us work together as we wait for the day of his enthronement.

Amen. Let's pray. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

And Father, before that day comes, we pray increasingly that your will may be done in our lives, that as we live in the kingdom of the world, that we live as citizens of another kingdom, showing the marvelous deeds of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

We ask this in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.