

2 Samuel 2:1-11

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[0:00] Vaughan, come and read to us from 2 Samuel, chapter 2, verses 1 to 11. In the course of time, David inquired of the Lord, Shall I go up to one of the towns of Judah? he asked.

The Lord said, Go up. David asked, Where shall I go? To Hebron, the Lord answered. So David went up there with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel, and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel. David also took the men who were with him, each with his family, and they settled in Hebron and its towns. Then the men of Judah came to Hebron, and there they anointed David king over the tribe of Judah.

When David was told that it was the men from Jabesh Gilead who had buried Saul, he sent messengers to them to say to them, The Lord bless you for showing the kindness to Saul, your master, by burying him.

May the Lord now show you kindness and faithfulness, and I too will show you the same favor because you have done this. Now then, be strong and brave, for Saul, your master, is dead, and the people of Judah have anointed me king over them.

[1:30] Meanwhile, Abner, son of Ner, the commander of Saul's army, had taken Ish-bosheth, son of Saul, and brought him over to Manheim.

He made him king over Gilead, Ashuri, and Jezreel, and also over Ephraim, Benjamin, and all Israel.

Ish-bosheth, son of Saul, was 40 years old when he became king over Israel, and he reigned two years. The tribe of Judah, however, remained loyal to David.

The length of time David was king in Hebron over Judah was seven years and six months. Amen. Thank you so much, Yvonne.

It's very kind of people to read when they know that they're going to come across words which are tricky to pronounce, so we're very grateful to you. Thank you, Yvonne. Let me just try and take a few seconds just to set the scene before I start this morning, because I know some of you are coming cold to the book of 2 Samuel, and you might not know exactly where we are.

[2:48] David has been hiding in the city of Ziklag. Ziklag is down in the far south of the country, and he is hiding from Saul, who has been trying to kill him.

But now in a battle with the Philistines, Saul is dead, and Jonathan, his son, is dead. And David, who had been unable to join in the battle, is back in Ziklag and is now waiting to work out what to do.

An Amalekite has turned up in Ziklag with Saul's crown and his armlet from his arm. And so David here, as we find him in the book of 2 Samuel, chapter 2 and verse 1, is there waiting to work out what it is to do.

Now, when we left David last week, the Amalekite had just brought to him Saul's crown and his armlet. And even before that, we already knew that David was going to become the king.

Way back in 1 Samuel, chapter 16, David had been anointed as the king-in-waiting by the prophet Samuel. And so the big question for us as we come to the beginning of chapter 2, as David is now, you know, he has the crown, Saul the king is dead.

[4:01] The big question for you and I as we read this chapter is, what is David going to do? What is David going to do? How will David start off his rule as king? What kind of kingdom will David build?

What kind of ruler will he be? You know, will he be like Saul who basically bumbled his way along, playing rather light regard for God's law and his promises? Or will David be different to that?

Will David obey God and his law and his commands and his promises? And you look down at verse 1 and like we saw a moment ago with the children, you'll notice that the very first thing that David

does is he inquires of the Lord.

Lord, give me wisdom. Give me direction, asks David. And you and I as we read that, we should really, if we're invested in the story, which we should be, we should breathe a sigh of relief.

Thank goodness. Here is a king who is going to listen to God. So you think about it like this.

Imagine for a moment that you have been designing a house to build for yourself to live in.

[5 : 04] I know some of us dream of those kind of things, don't we? But imagine that you have, you know, you've drawn up these plans of this house that you want to live in. You know exactly where the walls are going to be. You know where the bathroom is going to be.

You know where the kitchen is going to be. You know where your, you know, your cinema room, maybe you can have one of those. You know, you can dream, can't you? You know, that's where that's going to be. And today is day one of the builder turning up.

What do you want the builder to do as he turns up onto your building site to build the house that you planned? Well, let me tell you what you don't want him to do. You don't want him to leave the plan in his van and just come starting digging holes wherever he wants to and putting up walls wherever he wants to and setting out bathrooms wherever he feels like he'd like to.

You don't want him to do that, do you? No, because if the builder is going to build your house, he must follow your plan. Otherwise, it's not your house he's building. It's his house he's building, right? And that's exactly what's going on here. God isn't building a house. He's building a kingdom, a kingdom that he has designed and he has been the architect of from before the foundation of the world, a place where he's going to be loved and worshipped, a place where people will know him and know what he's like, a place of peace and justice where right is right, is wrong, is wrong and people trust him and worship him.

[6 : 22] And so, if God is going to build a kingdom like that, well, just like a builder needs to follow your plan in order to build your house, so the king of God's people, God's king, must build God's kingdom by following God's plan.

And the great news in our story here as we start out is that's exactly what you find David doing. He starts off not by just digging a hole wherever he wants it and putting up a wall wherever he fancies. Instead, he inquires of the Lord.

And to make this point super clear that God's king must build God's kingdom by following God's plan, the story that we're told in 2 Samuel 2 contrasts David with a guy called Abner.

Abner in verses 8 to 11. And the bit in between verses 1 to 4 and then 8 to 11 shows us just why this is so important. So let's start with this contrast between David and Abner.

In verse 1, David asks God whether he should go up to one of the cities of Judah. So David is down south in Ziklag, but he knows that he can't rule from a Philistine city.

[7 : 26] And because he's from the tribe of Judah, he asks whether he should go back to his tribal homelands to rule from there. And God tells him to go up, specifically to go up to Hebron.

And look at verse 1. In the course of time, David inquired of the Lord, shall I go up to one of the towns of Judah? He asked. The Lord said, go up. Where shall I go? David asked to Hebron. The Lord answered.

And so that's exactly what David does. And just to make sure that you understand that David is obeying properly, you're told that he takes everything he has from Ziklag. Verse 2, David went up there with his two wives, Anahim of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel.

And he also took the men who were with him, each with his family, and they settled in Hebron and its towns. In other words, David, if you like, is drawing a line under the Ziklag days.

Those days are gone. I am moving away from there, he says. And there in Hebron they make him king. Verse 4, then the men of Judah came to Hebron, and there they anointed David king over the tribe of Judah.

[8 : 28] Now while that's all going on in Ziklag and then in Hebron, if you look down at verse 8, you'll find Abner. Now Abner, who you may not have heard of before, is the commander of Saul's army.

And he takes Ish-bosheth, Saul's remaining son, and makes him king, king over the remaining tribes. But here's the thing to notice. Instead of making him king in Saul's hometown of Gibeah, he takes him all the way up to Mahanahim to make him king there.

It's almost as if he's running away to a safe place before he makes him king. Now the contrast between David and Abner becomes really clear in the words that are used here. So David inquires

of God with words like, shall I, which he repeats twice.

While in verse 8, we're told that Abner takes Ish-bosheth, and verse 9, makes him king. And while David, we're told, goes up, up, up, it's a word actually in the Hebrew which is repeated, I think, five times in verses 1 to 3.

The NIV doesn't translate all of them because it just sounds messy in the English. While David goes up, up, up, up, up, Abner instead goes over to Mahanahim in verse 8. In other words, David here is moving up to Hebron in obedience to God, while Abner is kind of moving over, out the way, off to the side, to try and accomplish his own plan and make his own king.

[9 : 52] And why is it? Well, it's because God's king must build God's kingdom by following God's plan, and David is God's king, and Abner and Ish-bosheth is not.

That's quite a tongue twister. Now, the significance of all this is there in those verses right in the middle. So between verse 4 and verse 8, you have this account of David going to the people of Jabesh-gilead.

Now, David, who is a wise king, God's king, speaks to the people of Jabesh-gilead. It's right up in the north, right next to where Abner has made Ish-bosheth king. It's the purple arrow on our map. Meaning this is now well outside of David's territory. Okay, this is really close to Abner. But still David sends messengers to them because the people of Jabesh-gilead are the people who rescued Saul's body after it had been taken from Mount Gilboa by the Philistines.

So Saul, you remember, was killed by the Philistine army. And so they took his body and put it on display. And the people of Jabesh-gilead went and rescued Saul's body and buried it.

[11 : 01] And David wants to thank them for their dedication. So listen to what he says. Look down at verse 5. He sent messengers to them to say, The Lord bless you for showing this kindness to Saul, your master, by burying him.

May the Lord now show you kindness and faithfulness. And I too will show you the same favour because you have done this. Now then, be strong and brave, for Saul, your master, is dead.

And the people of Judah have anointed me king over them. Now just think really carefully about what's happening here. Even though Jabesh-gilead is right next to where Abner has made Ish-bosheth king, making a king of his own, still David is reaching out there and thanking them and asking that the Lord might show them kindness and faithfulness.

Now at first reading you might just think, that doesn't sound like very much. That just sounds like David is writing some kind of thank you letter or something like that. But actually what's going on here is the words kindness and faithfulness are important Bible words for covenant keeping.

Sounds like someone else's, someone's Bible is reading itself.

[12 : 16] Does anyone know whose Bible that is? Jeff! Sorry. I was like, wow, I can hear God's word coming from somewhere in the ether. But it's just, it's just Jeff's phone.

Okay, come back to the passage kindness and faithfulness. Kindness is the Hebrew word heset. Faithfulness is combined with it. It means covenant keeping, promise keeping. The loyal and loving actions of someone who has made a commitment to someone else. And David's point to the people of Jabesh Gilead is, is God is a promise making, promise keeping God.

A God who is full of hesed, kindness and faithfulness to his people. And all the way through the Old Testament, God has revealed himself to be this kind of God. A God who makes promises and keeps them in kindness and faithfulness.

God said to Moses that he was abounding in kindness and faithfulness. A keeper of kindness and faithfulness. In other words, God's promises in the scripture work out in lots and lots and lots of kindness and faithfulness.

[13 : 33] And how are the people of Jabesh Gilead going to now experience the kindness and faithfulness of God? Well, look at verse six. And David says, And I too will show you the same favor because you have done this.

In a very practical sense here, the people of Jabesh Gilead are being invited to experience God's hesed, his kindness and faithfulness through David.

David is going to be the conduit, if you like, the way that hesed, kindness and faithfulness come to the people of Jabesh Gilead. If you want to be a part of what God is doing, he says, come to me.

I am the new king, the one that's been installed in Judah. And I will be the one who will show you kindness and faithfulness. It will come through me. God's love will come to you through me, says David.

Because of that, the people of Jabesh Gilead should be strong and valiant and know that God will keep his promise through David the king. Now, we're going to find out in weeks to come how more that works out.

[14:39] But for now, let me just draw our attention, I think, to two big lessons from today's story. Two big lessons. The first one is this. Sin does not give up easily.

I think as you read the story, the thing that you're supposed to notice is this massive surprise is that Abner does not surrender, right? Think about it. Things are pretty bad for Abner. He has been the commander of Saul's army, but his king is dead. Loads of his army are also dead. He's on the run from the seat of power.

He doesn't even own the crown anymore or the armlet of King Saul. He didn't have opportunity to rescue those from the dying king. Yet still, despite all of that circumstances, still Abner makes Ish-bosheth king.

It's even worse than that, I think, when you think about it, because Abner also knew that David had been promised the kingdom. Everybody knew it. He was almost certainly there, Abner, in 1 Samuel 24, verse 20, when Saul himself said that David is going to be king after him.

[15:48] In other words, it's totally obvious, even by this point of the story, which way this is going. The kingdom is going to David. Yet still, Abner installs Ish-bosheth as king. And you and I are to think, why is he not giving up?

Why is he not giving up? Where is his illogical, crazy, sneaky commitment to establish an alternative kingdom coming from? Why don't you just give up already? And I think in the story, we're to understand that Abner, in some senses, symbolizes to us unrighteousness, opposition to God's true king.

God's kindness and faithfulness is found in David, not in Abner. Abner is the opposite of David, which means that the lesson for us is something like this, that you and I should not be surprised in this world or in our lives that unrighteousness, wickedness, sin, does not give up easily, even when, as Christians, it's obvious that it's lost.

The devil is wounded mortally. Sin has been defeated by Christ, yet still, it does not give up easily. It will go to great lengths to get what it wants. If you're a Christian, our sinful nature does not see that we have turned to Christ and go, oh well, I'll probably quit then.

[17:10] It doesn't do that. It carries on and the battle goes right to the end. You and I know, don't we, if we're Christians this morning, we know there's no future in getting angry. You know, don't you, if you're a Christian this morning, when you meet the Lord and you are with him, you will no longer be angry.

There has no future for your anger. It achieves nothing now. It has no eternal future. But still we get angry, don't we? It's the same for unfaithfulness or lovelessness or disobedience or coveting.

All those things are destined for the pit of hell. And yet still they don't give up today. The great help here though, I think, is that it shows us that our ongoing battle with sin, really at its heart, is a battle with pride.

Why is it that Abner does not stand down? I think it is because to do that would have been to admit that he had been fighting for the wrong side all along. But he's still got some of the tribes.

I don't have to admit that just yet, do I? I've still got all the other tribes other than Judah and possibly the Levites who were distributed amongst Judah and the rest of the tribes. I don't have to admit I'm right.

[18:22] I'm going to cling on for a little bit. I'm not going to give up. Let me ask you this morning whether you've understood this before, that to become a Christian or even to make progress in your Christian life, to break a habit of sin, to recommit yourself to the life and ministry of a local church, do you know what?

That requires that you admit in part or in the whole that you have been fighting for the wrong team all along. The biggest barrier to Christian growth or even to becoming a Christian if you're not one this morning, is pride.

Being a Christian is not an invitation to try harder, to think smarter, to be better. No, the invitation to become a Christian is an invitation to surrender to Jesus. Sin doesn't want you just to do wrong stuff.

Sin wants to rule you and reign in your life. And let me tell you that this fight with your sinful nature won't go away. It won't give up easy.

You know, you won't become a Christian and find that you are never tempted again, that you never end up saying something that you know you shouldn't or doing something you know you shouldn't because sin does not surrender even when it knows it's beat.

[19 : 33] And 2 Samuel wants us not to be surprised by that. So we hear the story of Abner carrying on fighting. Secondly though, and I think perhaps most significantly, is King Jesus comes down to bring God's blessing.

I think the main thing here is in this contrast between David and Jesus. Jesus is King David's greater son. The king not of Judah or even just of Israel, but the king of God's heavenly eternal kingdom.

And in our story, we see David going up, up, up, up, up, don't we? To become God's king in Hebron. And by contrast, we see Jesus in the New Testament, God's king of heaven coming down, down, down, down, down, down.

The eternal divine son of divine essence with the father and the spirit dwelling in the glories of heaven for all eternity comes down to be king. Leaving the glories of heaven to come down and live on this earth.

Born as a humble baby in a manger in Bethlehem, a big come down, but he still comes down further until the final humiliation when his enthronement is not on a great seat in Jerusalem, but on a cross outside the city.

[20 : 53] Down at the very bottom, naked, hanging on a cross and dying, bearing the sin and judgment that we deserve for our sin. Down, down, down comes King Jesus.

But there's more to this, I think, because David goes up, up, up to Hebron and then becomes the conduit of God's blessing, doesn't he, to Jabesh Gilead. And King Jesus comes down, down, down to the throne of the cross and then says that He is the conduit of God's blessing to us.

Through Him flow God's steadfast love, His kindness and His faithfulness. As He perfectly obeys His Father's plan, even to people in rebel territory, people like us, through Jesus comes God's kindness and faithfulness.

Think about the passage like this, just with me for a moment as we finish. Here, if you like, is the new message to the people, not of Jabesh Gilead, but of West Kilburn Baptist Church.

News that kindness and faithfulness of the promise-keeping God is still here. The Lord of Lords, the maker of heaven and earth, the triune God of Father, Son and Spirit has a promise for us.

[22 : 10] A promise to rescue not just a nation, but a group of people from all nations, languages, tribes and peoples. Not to live in Israel, but to live in the eternal glories of a world remade by His power, basking forever in His kindness and His faithfulness.

And you and I, like the residents of Jabesh Gilead, are invited by the King to come and join in with the blessing. And where will you find that love?

Through whom is that God keeping His promise? Well, through King Jesus, through His perfect obedience in going down, down, down, all the way to the cross, as God's King builds God's kingdom in God's way.

So great story to read yourself into like that. Now, if you imagine that you're there in Jabesh Gilead and you hear these messages from David arrive, they tell you that there's this great covenant blessing of God and it's coming to you from King David, what do you do when you hear that?

If you're in Jabesh Gilead. Oh, that's interesting. Fascinating. Now, what's on TV? Is that what you say? Well, that's all very interesting about that guy, David. I kind of like that guy, David.

[23 : 22] I've heard stuff about him. Like he was a, he was a kind of impressive guy, right? Didn't he beat that Goliath character? Yeah, I've heard of him. Yeah, that's very fascinating. I like him. Now, let me get on with my own plan for my life.

Is that what you're going to do? Oh yeah, that's all very well and good, that David thing. But he's all the way down there south. You know, Abner's right here next to me. I think I'm going to follow Abner. Well, if you were in Jabesh Gilead, you'd be a fool to do those things, wouldn't you?

So it is with Jesus. Here is the news that God's blessing, a place in glory for all eternity, forgiveness of your sin, strength for today, hope for tomorrow, life beyond the grave.

All of those things can come to you, not through your own efforts, but through King Jesus. So what are you going to do? Oh yeah, I've heard of that Jesus guy. He's quite an impressive person, isn't he?

Now on with my own life. You'd be a fool to live like that, wouldn't you? Instead, what you do is you do what the people of Jabesh Gilead did. You return that message with faith and trust.

[24 : 22] Thank you, Jesus, that you rule and reign. I trust in you. You have my loyalty and my allegiance. You are my king. I will live for you. I will love you.

You have my life. I'm not going anywhere else for blessings. I'm fully here. I surrender to you, King of kings and Lord of lords. Let me pray and then we'll sing together.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, how we thank you that your kindness and faithfulness come to us not through our own obedience, not even through attendance at church, but come to us through King Jesus, whose throne is a cross as he pays the price for our sin.

Oh, please help us, we pray, to surrender to him. We say, Lord, you rule and reign in our lives.

We're sorry for the ways that we have tried to rule ourselves and accomplish our own plans and pay very little attention to you and yours.

Please forgive us and rule in us, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.