

2 Samuel 10, Kindness Rejected

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[0 : 00] And Liz is going to come and read God's word for us. So Liz, over to you. Thank you. To Samuel chapter 10. In the course of time, the king of the Ammonites died and his son Hanum succeeded him as king.

David thought, I will show kindness to Hanum, son of Nahash, just as his father showed kindness to me. So David sent a delegation to express his sympathy to Hanum concerning his father. When David's men came to the land of the Ammonites, the Ammonite commanders said to Hanum, their lord, do you think David is honoring your father by sending envoys to you to express sympathy?

Hasn't David sent them to you only to explore the city and to spy it out and overthrow it? So Hanum seized David's envoys, shaved off half of each man's beard, cut off their garments of the buttocks and sent them away.

When David was told about this, he sent messengers to meet the men, but they were greatly humiliated. The king said, stay at Jericho till your beards have grown and then come back.

[1 : 13] When the Ammonites realized that they had become obnoxious to David, they hired 20,000 Aramean foot soldiers from Beth Rehob and Zobah, as well as the king of Marka with 1,000 men and also 12,000 men from Tob.

On hearing this, David sent Joab out with the entire army of fighting men. The Ammonites came out and drew up in battle formation at the entrance of the city gate, while the Arameans of Zobah and Rehob and the men of Tob and Meaka were by themselves in the open country.

Joab saw that there were battle lines in front of him and behind him. So he selected some of the best troops in Israel and deployed them against the Arameans. He put the rest of the men under the command of Abishai, his brother, and deployed them against the Ammonites.

Joab said, if the Arameans are too strong for me, then you are to come to my rescue. But the Ammonites are too strong for you, then I will come and rescue you.

Be strong and let us fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. The Lord will do what is good in his sight.

[2 : 32] Then Joab and the troops went with him. Then Joab and the troops with him advanced to fight the Arameans and they fled before him. When the Ammonites realized that the Arameans were fleeing, they fled before Abishai and went inside the city.

So Joab returned from fighting the Ammonites and came to Jerusalem. After the Arameans saw that they had been routed by Israel, they regrouped. Hadadiza had Arameans brought from beyond the river Euphrates.

They went to Helam with Shobak, the commander of Hadadiza's army leading them. When David was told of this, he gathered all Israel, crossed the Jordan and went to Helam.

The Arameans formed their battle lines to meet David and fought against him. But they fled before Israel and David killed 700 of their charities, 40,000 of their foot soldiers.

He also struck down Shobak, the commander of their army, and he died there. When all the kings who were vassals of Hadadiza saw that they had been routed by Israel, they made peace with the Israelites and became subject to them.

[3 : 44] So the Arameans were afraid to help the Ammonites anymore. Now, as we start this morning, I want you to imagine with me that you're at the top of a roller coaster.

Looking at some of you, it's probably been a few years since you've been on a roller coaster. So let me try and describe it for you and what it's like. You know, roller coasters make that sort of slow ascent, don't they?

And it goes click, click, click, click, click, click as you get to the top of the roller coaster. And then you hang there just for a few moments. And you know that it's about to thunder down the loops and go round and round.

But just for a few seconds, you're hanging there at the top of the roller coaster. Click, click, click, click, stop. What are you thinking to yourself in that moment as you're at the top of the roller coaster?

Right at the top, you know it's about to hurtle down the tracks. What are you checking? Well, I think if you're anything like me, you're going to be just giving it a little push on that safety bar, aren't you? [4 : 54] Is that properly engaged? Is that actually going to hold me? You'll probably glance across to the five-year-old who's sat next to you perfectly calmly and thinking, I'll pull myself together, Steve.

If they think they're going to be all right, you're going to be all right. But it's that last minute thought, isn't it? Am I going to be safe? Is this going to be okay?

Let me check. Now, in a way, 2 Samuel chapter 10 is that kind of pause at the top of a roller coaster. We've climbed the heights, if you've been with us, we've climbed the heights of David's success.

We have seen him being anointed as king. We've seen him uniting the kingdom. We've seen him getting everybody together underneath his rule in Jerusalem. And we are about to descend into the chaos of the rest of his life.

And if you know anything about the story of David, you know that there are some twists and turns to come. It's going to be a terrifying run. And here in chapter 10, you've got this pause.

[5 : 57] You're hanging at the top. It's about to fall. And there is, in chapter 10, a safety check for us. Right at the heart of the passage, the safety bar for the roller coaster of life, if you want to put it that way.

And it's what we looked at with the children. And so I want us to come and spend most of our time thinking about that and how that works. But before we do that, let me just run through the story so that we know what's going on here.

The story starts, doesn't it, with David showing kindness again. We saw last week him showing kindness to a guy called Mephibosheth. But this time he is showing kindness to a guy called Hanan, who is the new king of the Ammonites.

We haven't got time for all of that background, but Hanan's father, Nahash, appears previously in the book of 1 Samuel, chapter 11, when he threatens the residents of a place called Jabesh Gilead, telling them that he's coming and he's going to gouge out their right eyes.

Anyway, Saul, who's the king of Israel, comes to rescue them and defeats the Ammonite army. And ever since then, he's put Nahash in his place. But now Nahash is dead in 2 Samuel, chapter 10, and his son, Hanan, is king in his place.

[7 : 06] And David thinks, OK, so what I'm going to do, I defeated his father, or my predecessors all defeated his father, and we had a treaty with him. Let me now show kindness to his son so that we might carry on in this relationship with one another.

The word kindness there is the Hebrew word *hesed* that we saw last week. It's this sense of a promised kindness, a covenant, that there's been this sort of arrangement between David and the Ammonites that we will be kind to you.

But Hanan has other ideas, doesn't he? On the advice of his young princes, he's persuaded that David had bad motives in sending servants to his land. So what do they do? Well, they humiliate them. They shave off half of their beards, and they cut their clothes off at the waist.

Now, as insults go, that's pretty bad, isn't it? Cutting off half their beards would have been seen as an insult to their manliness. And chopping off their clothes at the hips meant that they had to walk home with their buns exposed, which would have been embarrassing.

But it's not a kind of practical joke, is it? Actually, they know, don't they? Hanan knows. David understands. This is effectively the weirdest, but most successful, the weirdest declaration of war you've ever heard in your life.

[8 : 22] How can I declare war against David? Well, I tell you what, he'll send envoys to me. I'll shave off half their beards and cut off their clothes so they walk home semi-naked. He will know I'm in business.

And so that's what happens. The Ammonites get themselves ready. Now, without getting too technical or boring you with the details here, the way the rest of the story is broken up is with a series of five they saw or they heard statements which come at the beginning of each scene. That there's one in verse 6, one in verse 7, one in verse 9, one in verse 15, and one in verse 19. Starting off in verse 6, the NLV translates it, they realized. Literally, the Ammonites see war coming. They have hired a load of help then from the Syrians. And then David, when he hears that in verse 7, sends out Joab with the mighty men to sort it out. It seems from the context, and we'll see this in weeks to come, that most of this happens in the city of Rabba.

And the situation is perilous for Joab because the Ammonites come and meet him outside the city while the hired Syrians come behind him, trapping the soldiers in between two armies, one just outside the city and one coming up from behind him.

[9 : 33] In response, Joab sets his brother up to fight the Ammonites in front of the city while he takes the best of the men to fight the professional soldiers who've come from Syria, telling his brother Abishai that they will fight for one another, helping each other out if it all gets a bit much.

What's amazing and should stun you as you read the passage is that both Joab and Abishai win, and the Assyrians flee back into their city of Rabba, and the Assyrians run back and regroup. Now the follow-up battle with the Assyrians at Rabba will happen in chapters 11 and 12, and you might know a guy called Uriah the Hittite who dies close to the wall, and we'll find out more about that story in weeks to come.

So chapter 10 kind of works as this link passage, if you like. It links back with David's hesed kindness in chapter 9, and it links forward with this battle for a place called Rabba, which we'll find in weeks to come.

But before that, the Syrians have regrouped and they're ready for a second try. Hadadezer, their king, has gathered more of his military power, but still he is defeated by David and the Israelites, killing 40,000 of their horsemen and 700 of their chariot riders, including their army captain.

[10 : 48] Now, if all that seems familiar to you, it's because this victory was also mentioned in chapter 8, which we saw previously. It's a famous victory as David wins peace with the surrounding nations, and they all think twice now about threatening David.

Now, that's the story. I grant you that the killing of 40,000 soldiers doesn't exactly sound like calm before a storm, but believe me, if you know the rest of this story, this is the calm before the storm. This is the very top of the roller coaster. Click, click, click, and we're here. It's all downhill from here. And then look at the safety check right in the middle here.

This is the final test of the bar of the roller coaster. Look at verse 12. Let me read it to you again. Be strong. Let us fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God.

The Lord will do what is good in his sight. Now, it's worth noting that this is Joab, the crazy commander of David's army, who's saying this.

[11 : 48] Joab, who to this point, and really from this point, shows himself essentially to be a thug, who's capable of killing lots of different people. But here the writer puts these amazing words in his mouth, which are meant to help us navigate the rest of the book of 2 Samuel.

So let's just consider those words together and work backwards through them with me. Notice the statement at the end. Notice that he says that the Lord will do what is good in his sight.

That might sound to you just relatively straightforward. Of course, God will do what is good in his sight. That's kind of obvious, isn't it? Every religion, everybody who believes in God says, oh yeah, God does what's good to him. God does what's good in his sight.

But there's more to it than that, because it's interesting that while Joab is confident that God will do what seems good to him, he knows that there is no promise to him that he and his brother Abishai will survive the next few hours.

He has no promise of victory for his army. So look at the beginning of the sentence, as we read with the children from verse 11. He says, if the Arameans are too strong for me, then you are to come to my rescue. But if the Ammonites are too strong for you, then I will come to rescue you.

[12 : 54] Be strong and let us fight bravely. There's a lot of ifs there. Joab is genuinely not sure what is going to happen next, even while he is sure that God will do what is good in his eyes.

He's pinned by the Ammonites and the Syrians. And his confidence is not, God is going to give me a famous victory here. It's not that, is it? It's God will do what seems good to him.

Now, that's not because Joab doesn't have faith. This isn't being written as a sign of Joab's weakness. Well, the point is that Joab knows enough to know that God will do what seems good to him, but that doesn't carry a particular specific promise that this situation that's in front of him. To put it really bluntly, Joab knows that it could seem good to God for him to be defeated. Think about it like this.

Joab is essentially articulating two truths for us. On the one hand, he knows that there is a God who rules and reigns, who has plans that can never be thwarted.

[14:00] God knows who he is and knows what he's doing and will do what he plans to do. He knows that David can defeat Goliath. He knows that trumpets and shouting can bring down city walls.

He knows that striking rods against rocks can produce water when God wants it to, that rivers can stand still and people can wear a cross. None of that is in doubt. He knows who God is and knows that God does what God says.

Yet on the other hand, he knows that there's a whole host of things in his life and in his world that he has absolutely no certainty for. There are things that God only knows, information which he has withheld from his people.

So Joab knows that he has not been promised victory in that moment, in that battle. You can imagine, can't you, that Joab, at this point in his life, one of his brothers has died in tragic circumstances, even though they were winning a battle.

He knows, doesn't he, that God is capable of fulfilling his plans whilst also humbling him. I might die, says Joab. Now keep working backwards in verse 12 with those two sets of information, God's solid plans and my uncertain future.

[15:15] What does Joab do with those two sets of information? What does he say to Abishai, his brother? You know, okay, God has his good plans. We're not sure what's going to happen to us. Run in fear.

No, he doesn't say that, does he? What does he say? Verse 12, he says, be strong, fight bravely for God's people and for the cities of God, fighting boldly for what they understand to be God's purposes, trusting that whatever the outcome for them personally, this is the best way to live our lives, trusting God, even though we're uncertain.

It's fascinating, isn't it? The safety bar at the top of this roller coaster in Joab's life and the life of Israel is not a promise that God will not bring hard things into their lives.

Notice that. The safety bar is not a promise that he will win every battle. It's a promise that God doing what is good in his sight is enough for him to live courageously, bravely, whatever the future holds.

Think about this for ourselves for a moment. Perhaps it is this morning that you are facing uncertain times. Maybe your job is a bit rocky. Maybe your family relationships are a bit difficult.

[16:31] Maybe your housing situation needs resolving. Perhaps you need to get a good set of results in your next exams. But listen, if you're a Christian this morning, what you need to understand is that those things are in this hand, not this one.

There is no guarantee that you'll get the grades that you want or the university place that you want or the job that you want or that the family relationships will work out as you want. There is nothing like that promised to you.

And being a Christian doesn't guarantee those things for you. Listen, if you find a preacher who says to you, listen, come to God and all of your plans will work out. If someone says that to you, don't listen to them.

They're a liar. God does what seems good to him, what is good in his sight. The God of the universe, the one who rules and reigns, who knows all things and governs all things, who never makes mistakes and never thwarted by circumstances, he will do what he knows is good, what is best in the fullest sense of the world.

He will do that. And that promise, the promise for God to do what is good in his sight is better for you than the promise for him to do whatever it is that you want him to do. And that means that you can live bravely for God, living not for yourself, but for God and his people and trusting his purposes.

[17:51] Think about another example with me for a moment. Maybe you're a parent. Let me tell you that there is no promise. This is in this hand. There is no promise that your children's lives will work out in the way that you want them to.

Some of you know that, don't you, painfully. There is no promise that they will trust in the Lord. There's no promise that they will live their lives for him, even though that's what we desperately long for. There is no promise from God that if you do A, B, C, D, it will all work out well for your children.

There is no promise like that. John Calvin, who's the great reformer of the 16th century, wrote in his sermon on this passage, he says this, we remain in suspense about much of our lives.

We remain in suspense. We just don't know. We don't know. Just like Joab, I think we would love a promise, wouldn't we, that we wouldn't lose our own lives. But don't forget that this suspense that we live in is intended to drive us to the Lord who does what is good in his sight.

Not away from him in despair, but towards him in dependence. It's a good thing that the God of infinite goodness and wisdom does what he thinks is best, not what I would like him to do necessarily.

[18 : 58] God's freedom to accomplish his plans rather than his bondage to do your plans is a good thing for all of us. So we should courageously live for him, commanding the gospel at every turn, making use of the things that he's given us in the life of the church to live patiently waiting for God to do what pleases him.

You can think about it too, can't you, with other examples. You can think about it with your health or with your job or with your marriage, that there's no promise that you will live as long as you want to. There's no promise that you'll have the job of your dreams.

There's no promise that your marriage will be easy and blissful. It might be that God has set for you suffering and difficulty in all of those areas, but that doesn't mean that God has forgotten you or in any sense that he's lost control or in any sense that you can't have confidence in him at all because God is doing what seems good to him so that you can live courageously for the Lord in the place that he's put you in, knowing that in all those uncertainties, they are still in God's good hands.

And he has more power than you and is achieving something more beautiful and glorious than our health or our wealth or our prosperity. Now that's the simple truth in 2 Samuel chapter 10.

But let me tell you, it's even more brilliant than that. Okay? There is something else going on in these verses which is so incredible it's going to blow our minds this morning when we see it.

[20 : 24] What's fascinating here is when Joab says this, okay? What is it that Joab has seen that makes him say, God will do what seems good to him even though I'm not sure what's going to happen to me?

What is it that Joab has seen that makes him say that? Do you know? Well, he has seen the kindness of King David be rejected, hasn't he? David, in covenant kindness, has moved towards these Ammonites and tried to show them this kind of promise-keeping love and care and it's been rejected.

And yet, still, he says, God will do what's good in his sight even though I don't know what's going to happen to me.

You know, he knows, doesn't he? If the kindness of the king can be rejected, there's no guarantee that me, a brutal warrior, is going to win this battle. David was kind and that was overturned.

How do I know what's going to happen to me? Now, if you zoom forward at one and a half thousand years from King David, you meet the real king, don't you?

[21 : 31] King Jesus, God the Son in human flesh. And what does he do? He doesn't send envoys to the Ammonites in covenant kindness, does he?

No, he comes to us in covenant kindness. He says, I have come not to be served, but to serve and give my life as a ransom for many. I have come in covenant kindness to you to love you and give my life for you.

And what happens to King Jesus in his hesed love? What happens? He's humiliated. Not by having his beard half shaved off, not by having his clothes cut down at the waist, but by being nailed to a cross in total nakedness.

All of his clothes removed, hanging in shame and guilt on the cross. And rather like the Ammonites, we declare war, don't we, on the kindness of God's king.

They declare war by doing that to David's envoys. We declare war on the God who made us by what we do to Jesus. And yet we find that even through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, even because of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, God rescues and saves people for himself, forgiving their sin, cancelling their moral debt, paying in his own blood what their sin deserves.

[22 : 58] Now, because that's true, because the rejection of the kindness of the king can lead to salvation for me, I have even more reason than Joab to say, God, do what seems good to you, even if I don't know what will happen to me.

God will do what is good in his sight and it will be good for me. That is the safety bar in my life, just like it's the safety bar in Joab's life. And if you like, when Joab pushes it, there's a few bits of wobbles.

When we put it, there's no wobble at all because we know that the kindness of King Jesus that was rejected through his death on the cross has led to our salvation. Those were the good plans of God. So ifs don't matter because God will do what seems good to him and so I cling to him. I can be of good courage, I can be strong, I can fight bravely to live a life that pleases him courageously for the people of God and his purposes as he works all things out for the accomplishment of his plan. Listen, I started this morning and we're at the top of this roller coaster and the next five chapters of 2 Samuel are terrifying. terrifying. But let me say the next five chapters of your life might be terrifying.

[24 : 16] Who knows if we're even going to have another five chapters. Yet I know that there are some of you this morning who are still imagining that you can ride the roller coaster of whatever life is bringing next without a safety bar at all, without any confidence in the Lord Jesus.

You know, I don't know what it is that you're thinking as you stare down the track of the rest of your life not knowing where it's going or what's going to happen. I don't know what you're thinking that you assume that you do not need to know a God who has good plans even in the ifs of our own lives.

How do you imagine that you can ride that roller coaster without him? Listen, we're paused today at the top, aren't we? Click, click, click and we're waiting and today is the day to grab the safety bar and say, listen Lord, you have good plans.

There are lots of ifs in my life but you have good plans in the kindness of the Son of the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm grabbing hold of those and trusting you for that even in the ifs of my own life.

Saying to the Lord, Lord, thank you for opening my eyes to the terror that life is without you that I might trust in you. Now help me Lord to trust you, to live courageously for you, knowing that if the kindness of King Jesus can forgive my sin then there's no loop-de-loop in my life which can throw me off.

[25 : 43] There's no sudden drop or bank curve that will come equal to your sovereign goodness. For others of you this morning, I know because I talk to you, I know that even as Christians there are twists and turns and loop-de-loops in your own life which are scary and terrifying.

But we are paused together, aren't we, this morning to remind ourselves I belong to the Lord of closed-hand good plans even in the ifs of my own life.

And that means I can live bravely for the Lord. I can live courageously. Not trusting erroneous promises that say, hey, come to the Lord and everything will be alright. No.

But trusting that God does what seems good to him. You know, we're not promised, are we? It's the kind of theology of the street if you like, isn't it?

You know, if you do good things God will give you what you want. Yeah, that's how we talk, isn't it? You know, if I go to church, if I say my prayers, if I read my Bible, then God will give me the things that I want for my life.

[26 : 47] That's what we say, isn't it? Listen, that theology of the bus is nonsense just like everything else you hear on the bus, right? It's rubbish. What is true is that God has good plans in the Lord Jesus Christ centered on him, granted for us through no good thing that we have done, only through his kindness to us and we can trust those plans even if ours don't work out.

So we say, don't we, God, do what you want. I trust you that what seems good to you is what I want for my life.

Trust in me, says the Lord Jesus, and I will do something that is even better than your own dreams. I will fulfill my plans and dreams, says the Lord.

Let me pray as we close. Heavenly Father, we come before you this morning and we say that we're sorry that we've had the arrogance even to suggest to you that you should accomplish our plans and not your own.

And yet, Lord, we also come with the tears and pain of knowing loss and difficulty and challenge and pain. And yet, Lord, we want to, by faith, say, Lord, do what is good in your sight and the Lord's

and the Lord's love.

[28 : 16] And I will say that we trust you first. We would rather live in a world where you're in charge than one where we're in charge because we know that if you're the God who can save through the death of your son, you are the God who can bring us into your eternal kingdom even through a thousand pains and sufferings.

So please, Lord, keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. Keep our hearts tender to him, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.