

2 Samuel 3:1-:39

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Preacher: Nick Lauer

[0 : 00] So we are back in 2 Samuel tonight.

So let's pick up where we left off last week. We're going to pick up with chapter 3 tonight. That's page 256 in the Pew Bible. It's a long passage that we're looking at tonight, so we won't put it on the screens.

But let me encourage you to turn there in a Bible so you can follow along in the text. Page 256, 2 Samuel chapter 3. We're going to cover the whole of the third chapter tonight.

And as you turn there, here's the proposition that I want us to consider tonight from 2 Samuel chapter 3. And it is this. Human corruption cannot confound God's kingdom.

Human corruption cannot confound God's kingdom. In this chapter that we're going to look at tonight, we've got basically three main characters. And each of those three characters is pretty much a study in human selfishness and corruption.

[1 : 15] So we are going to look briefly at each one of those characters. And next we're going to consider God's kingdom in all of that. And then we'll end by making some applications. So let's dive right in.

Starting at verse 1. Look at verse 1 with me. 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.

You'll remember from last week, at this point in Israel's history, there are two rival kings vying for the throne of all Israel. The second half, actually, of chapter 2, which we didn't get a chance to go over in detail last week, tells the story of how these rival kings ended up sort of erupting into a civil war in Israel.

On one side was Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, carrying on the house of Saul along with his general Abner. And on the other side was, of course, David, along with his general Joab.

Two sides, civil war. And as we know, as we've been following the story of Samuel, that the Lord is with David. So over time, as verse 1 puts it, David grows stronger and stronger and the house of Saul grows weaker and weaker.

[2 : 29] There's the context. Jump down to verse 6. Here's the first character in our story. Abner. While there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner was making himself strong in the house of Saul.

Now, that should come as no surprise. After all, as we saw last week, Abner was really the one who made Ish-bosheth king after Saul's death. Abner took him, made him king, and set it all up.

He was the one who was really in control. He was the neck that was turning the head, right? And it was Abner who marched out in battle at the second half of chapter 2 who provoked the civil war in the first place.

Now, you have to admit, Abner was, of course, he must have been a highly talented man. He must have been skillful in war. He must have been wise in diplomacy.

He must have been a natural leader. People must have naturally wanted to follow him. But as verse 6, this verse we just read, shows us, Abner's heart is driven by what?

[3 : 39] Driven by power. A desire to make himself strong. Let's pick up his story in verse 7. Now, Saul had a concubine whose name was Rizba, the daughter of Aiah.

And Ish-bosheth said to Abner, Why have you gone into my father's concubine? Then 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. So here is Abner, this man driven by power, and now he is crossed, his will is crossed by Ish-bosheth. And in the ancient world, the action of sleeping with another king's concubine was basically a symbolic way of claiming authority over everything else that that king owned. So it was a pretty brazen act.

[4 : 56] And we don't know actually whether or not the accusation was true, whether Abner actually did this or whether he didn't do this. But either way, in frustration, taking great offense, Abner says, forget you Ish-bosheth, and he defects.

He abandons this puppet king that he set up, and he goes over to David. Abner couldn't stand to have his will crossed. But you know, his defection here probably wasn't just a brash decision in the heat of anger.

Because as we've seen, Abner was no fool, right? He knew probably at this point that David's side was winning. And now, here was Abner's chance to keep seeking power for himself.

He'd give the kingdom to David. And we imagine in doing so, Abner would probably secure a place of power for himself in David's kingdom. So chapter 3 continues.

In verse 12, Abner reaches out to David and offers to make a covenant with him. David accepts.

And in verse 17, Abner upholds his end of the bargain. He brings the elders of Israel, that is all the northern tribes who are against David at this point.

[6 : 03] He brings all the elders of Israel over to David's side. And in verses 20 and 21, if you scan down there, Abner and David seal their agreement with a meal, with a feast, which was a common way of ratifying covenants of treaties in the ancient world.

Now, for just a moment, consider Abner here and his thirst for power. He props up Ish-bosheth and then hangs him out to dry. He makes this utterly bombastic claim in verse 12.

Look at verse 12. He asks this rhetorical question, to whom does the land belong? In other words, Abner's saying, the land really belongs to me. I'm the one who's going to give it to you. But then we see in verse 17 that going over to David, look down at verse 17, that's exactly what all the elders of the northern tribes, they wanted at this point.

So Abner here saw a moment of opportunity when all the chips were in the right place and he played them for his own power and his own benefit.

So here then is the first portrait of human corruption, Abner, the man driven by power to make himself strong.

[7 : 20] But in verse 22, another character enters the picture. Joab. Joab shows up right after this feast between David and Abner and when he finds out what David has just done, Joab says to David in verse 24, look at verse 24, 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're going out and you're coming in and to know all that you're doing.

Basically, Joab is saying, David, you cannot trust this guy. He's just here to spy on us so he can know our movements, know our weaknesses, and eventually defeat us.

You've been taken, David. What is going on? And on one hand, you can't blame Joab here, right? I mean, they're in the middle of a civil war and suddenly the opposing general just happens to change his mind and offer the kingdom to David on a silver platter, no strings attached.

A warrior like Joab knows that that's probably too good to be true. But you know, there's a deeper thing going on here with Joab.

[8 : 29] Joab isn't merely concerned for David's safety and for David's kingdom. Because you see, back in chapter two, when the civil war broke out between Abner's army and Joab's army, in all of that mess, Abner ended up killing Joab's brother.

Turn back to chapter two in your Bible. Turn back a page to chapter two, verse 18. Let's read this account. Chapter two is the first military encounter of the civil war, the sort of battle of Gibeon, and Abner's army is being beaten back at this point in the story.

Verse 18. And the three sons of Zeruiah were there, Joab, Abishai, and Azahel. Now Azahel was as swift of foot as a wild gazelle, and Azahel 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, Azahel? 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 Azahel would not turn aside from following him. And Abner said again to Azahel, 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?

[9 : 42] 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.

And all who came to the place where Azahel had fallen and died stood still. Here's the background between Abner and Joab.

And take note here that Abner killed Azahel in the middle of battle, in the middle of war. Azahel wasn't an innocent victim. In fact, Abner gave him, I mean, we just read it, gave him more than enough time to pick a different fight.

But Azahel refused and Abner drove him through with his spear. The picture there is Abner is basically just stopping, holding out his spear and Azahel running straight into it.

It's pretty graphic, actually. But this is something that Joab didn't forget. And in the months and years since his brother died, Joab was waiting for his opportunity to get revenge.

[10 : 51] Underneath Joab's outrage in chapter 3 that David would make a covenant with Abner is his thirst for getting even. To make Abner pay for the blood of his brother.

And that's exactly what he does. Back in chapter 3, verse 26, Joab sends a message to Abner without David knowing. And Abner returns to meet with Joab thinking that they're going to seal maybe a sort of pact.

Well, who's going to run the army now that we're sort of working on the same side? And Joab takes him aside privately and sticks a knife into his ribs and murders him in cold blood. And the narrator's very clear that all of this was motivated by pure revenge.

Look at verse 30. So Joab and Abishai, his brother, killed Abner because he had put their brother Asahel to death in the battle of Gibeon. Portrait number 2.

Joab, the man driven by revenge. But lastly, there's David. In verse 31, David responds rightly to Abner's death by lamenting and by honoring him.

[12 : 03] And he also publicly blames Joab for killing Abner. Look at verse 38. And the king, that is David, said to his servants, Do you not know that a prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel?

Speaking of Abner. And I was gentle today, though anointed king. And these men, the sons of Zeruah, that is Joab and Abishai, are more severe than I.

The Lord repay the evildoer according to his wickedness. But you know, even though David responds rightly to Abner's death, the narrator here wants us to see that not even David is innocent in these verses.

Of course, there's the question of why David doesn't remove Joab from his position. Think about it. What Joab did could have cost David the kingdom.

His personal vendetta could have exploded in David's face, brought more years of civil war, turned the people against David. But rather than removing Joab, David gives him what sort of feels like a slap on the wrist and moves on.

[13 : 10] But there are more troubling things that the narrator wants us to see. Go back to the beginning of the chapter. You notice that we skipped verses 2 through 5.

But look at them now. Here the narrator starts telling us about David's sons. And we find here that David's sons, many in number, were not born to one wife.

David's sons were not born to two wives. David's sons were not born to three wives, but six wives at this point in David's career. And when David cuts a deal with Abner in verse 13, his end of the bargain is that Abner bring him back his first wife, Michal.

That would be number 7 for David. And Michal, at this point, has already been remarried for years. Look at verse 15. And Nishbosheth sent for her, that is Michal, from her husband, Paltiel, the son of Leish.

But her husband went with her, weeping after her all the way to Baharim. Then Abner said to him, Go, return. And he returned.

[14:24] What a sad scene. This guy's wife being ripped away from him to add another to David's collection of wives. What are we to make of all this?

Well, I think there's a right way and there's a wrong way to understand David's multiple wives. Some would look at a passage like this and say, Look, these sorts of passages are proof that the Bible doesn't really have a consistent ethic when it comes to marriage.

They would point out that the patriarchs, like Abraham and Jacob had multiple wives and here David has multiple wives. So they'd say the Bible doesn't really teach just one thing about marriage. And because of that, well, we're free to change and to evolve as we see fit. You see, you can't really trust the Bible morally. So this reading goes.

But you know, that reading of this passage can't be right. And here's why. First off, just because something is described in the Bible doesn't mean it's prescribed.

[15:45] Do you see what I'm saying? In other words, the Bible's recounting history here. It's telling us what really happened and it's being brutally honest. But it's not saying, well, look, David did this, so you can do that too.

Are there any indications in this text that that's what the narrator wants us to get? But you know, there's another reason why the sort of revisionist reading can't be right.

I mean, friends, you simply have to look, look at the outcome of what happens on account of David taking all these wives. Yes, he had a lot of sons.

Yes, on the surface, it seems that he was establishing his rule. But his lust for multiple wives would bring nothing but heartache and dissolution to his kingdom.

In fact, in nearly every place where a man takes more than one wife in the Bible, nothing but trouble and problems follow in the wake. Just think of the story of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar.

[16:54] Remember how that one turned out? Bitterness, hatred, one of them getting sent away, sons that ended up hating each other. Or think back to 1 Samuel chapter 1.

Elkanah has two wives, Hannah and Penina. And what's the result? Bitterness, jealousy, heartache. So friends, I ask you, is the Old Testament saying, this is just fine.

Is the Bible being morally inconsistent and trustworthy? Of course not. Anyone who can read 2 Samuel and not realize that David's lust after multiple wives is nothing less than a ticking time bomb waiting to explode in turmoil and strife just doesn't know how to read a text.

What the narrator wants us to see is that David too for all of his virtues is also a picture of our common weakness and corruption.

He too is part of the problem. He's a man driven by lust. Okay. Now what are we to make of all this?

[18:14] Why in the world is this chapter in the Bible other than to be a bit depressing? What do we gain from these three portraits of our own corruption in a sense? It's like we're looking in a mirror, our enslavement to power and to revenge and to lust.

Well friends, I hope we can appreciate looking at a chapter like this that at least the Bible is a brutally honest book. The Bible is not willing for one second to turn away from the harsh reality of the fallen world that we live in or the harsh realities living within our own hearts.

The Bible is about sinners. Fallen, corrupt, selfish human beings. Humans just like you and me. But the Bible you see isn't just about sinners.

It's for sinners. The Bible is written for messed up people like Abner and Joab and David and like Nick and Greg and Matt and all of us.

People who hoard power, people who hold grudges, people who lust after people who aren't their spouses. These are the kind of people that God has come to rescue.

[19:38] And the God who inspired the pages of this story, friends, trust me, he is not ignorant and he is not surprised at anything that you've done. And this brings us back to what I said was I think the main idea that this text is showing us.

That human corruption cannot thwart the kingdom of God. Where do we see that in our text? Well, take a step back and take the whole chapter in. Try to view this chapter as a whole.

What happens when we take this 30,000 foot level and view? Well, what happens? Abner is removed, David is vindicated at the end, and God's kingdom takes another step forward.

Look at verse 36. David mourns Abner and the narrator says, and all the people took notice of it and it pleased them as everything that the king did pleased all the people.

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. Do you see what's happened? The biggest obstacle standing in the way of

David's uncontested reign in Israel, that is the person of Abner, has been taken away and in such a way that David is totally innocent of his blood.

[20 : 53] And the way in which this has fallen out ends up to mean that the people love David all the more. All the people, the narrator says, not just Judah, David's home tribe, but all the people.

God has just united the kingdom around David. So out of the mess of this chapter, the power-hungry betrayals, the revenge-fueled killings, the patriarchal exploitation of women, out of the cesspool of human corruption, God is still able to move his redemptive kingdom one step closer to its goal.

Human corruption, friends, cannot stop God's kingdom. But you know, there's an even greater example of this in the Bible, isn't there?

And it's at the center of the gospel itself. In Acts chapter 2, the apostle Peter stands up in Jerusalem and gives his Pentecost sermon. And in verse 23, he says to the crowd, this Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

Do you see what Peter's saying there? At the cross, God was able to take the most horrible sin of humankind, the crucifixion of his own son, and use it for the greatest triumph of his kingdom.

[22 : 20] The once for all defeat of sin and death and darkness. At the cross, human corruption could not thwart God's kingdom.

In fact, in the mystery of God's wisdom, in the mystery of God's sovereignty and human responsibility, the cross, in a way that boggles our mind, was at the same time both the result of God's plan and the result of lawless men.

God was able to accomplish his purposes even through the sinful acts of human beings. Let me end with three applications.

First, I think this text ought to cause us to worship God. Only God is loving enough and powerful enough to advance his purpose and his kingdom even in the face of the most fierce human corruption.

You and I are thwarted all the time, aren't we? My plans rarely seem to work out as planned even when everything's going right. I have two toddlers.

[23 : 35] Our plans are never carried out the way we want them to carry out because someone's dropping something or someone's forgetting something or one of them's having a breakdown.

When everything goes right, even our plans are often thwarted. But friends, for God, even when everything seems to be going wrong, his kingdom cannot fail.

God's God is God. He is second, this text does not give us an excuse to disobey God.

Abner, Joab, David, they were wrong to do what they did. They clearly disobeyed God's revealed will in scripture, right? So we must not think that just because, well, God's in control, that we can just do whatever and disregard God's commands.

No, just the opposite. We should obey God. We should follow his word in scripture with all the strength that he gives. But, this text does mean that we should not despair over our past mistakes and our past sins.

[24 : 59] Friends, Jesus died on the cross to forgive the sins of all who repent and believe. The apostle John will say, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

though you may have been as power hungry as Abner, betraying your friends and just looking out for number one, though you may have been as bitter and angry and murderous as Joab, though you may have been as lust driven as David, friend, there is no sin in your life so great that God cannot and does not forgive it through the cross of Christ.

And there is no sin so great in your life that God cannot bring his redemption through it or in spite of it. So do follow God's commands.

They're for your good. But don't despair over your sin. God's kingdom is bigger and more powerful than your sin and your failures. Third and last, as we see human corruption, not just in our own hearts, but also in the world around us.

We ought to apply this text by trusting that God's power and God's righteousness will ultimately prevail in our fallen world. Each day the newspapers carry more and more stories about refugees fleeing for their lives, murders and wars breaking out, hunger and oppression persisting, race relations deteriorating, but in the face of all this brokenness, friends, let us who know the risen

Christ not lose heart.

[26 : 50] God's kingdom will ultimately overcome all human corruption. And that truth doesn't make us passive. No, just the opposite.

It gives us encouragement, it gives us courage, and it gives us hope to pray for God's kingdom to come and God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. And it gives us the courage to speak and to act as God's agents of justice and healing right now.

Knowing that human corruption cannot thwart God's kingdom gives us the deep courage that we need to act. And of course in doing so we act humbly, don't we?

Because we know that we too are in need of grace. We too need God's kingdom to overcome our weakness and our failure. We too need the Lord Jesus and his spirit to cover our sins and to remake us in his image.

Friends, these are the things that we need. We need to know this. And so we can go out into the world humbly and boldly to be bearers of peace and bearers of grace and bearers of justice.

[28 : 02] Confident that our human corruption cannot thwart the kingdom of God. God, let's pray. Lord Jesus, thank you that through your cross and through your resurrection, you have forgiven sins and you have granted new life to all who come in humble faith to you.

Lord, thank you that none of the sins of our past can destroy your saving purposes. God, and that you will work all things out according to your redemptive plan in the end.

Lord, we confess that in the middle of the story of your redemptive work, we don't often see how the pieces connect. God, as we see heartbreak and as we see pain, we confess that we doubt and we wonder sometimes what's going on in the world.

And Lord, we cry out, how long? But oh Lord, help us to see that just as you took the mess of this passage and were able to bring through it just a spark of your good, God, one day you will take the mess of the world and you will flood it with your glory and you will bring healing and restoration and peace.

God, we long for that day. We look forward to it. In Jesus' name, amen. I want to mine. I want to see you in Jesus' name, amen.

[29 : 51] Now, I want to let you call me an name, Moojna, Wayne. I lover today he wanted to come to leave the tiger born to keep there