

1/18/26 - 2 Samuel 3:1-39 "Who Defines the Kingdom"

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 January 2026

Preacher: Brenton Beck

[0 : 00] The scripture reading this morning comes from 2 Samuel chapter 3.! We're going to be reading chapter 3 in its entirety today.

! And David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker.

And sons were born to David at Hebron. His firstborn was Amnon of Ahinnom of Jezreel, and his second, Chiliab of Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel, and the third, Absalom, the son of Maacah, the daughter of Ptolemy, king of Geshur. And the fourth, Adonijah, the son of Haggith. And the fifth, Shephethiah, the son of Abital. And the sixth, Ithrim of Eglah, David's wife. These were born to David in Hebron. While there was war between the house of Saul in the house of David, Abner was making himself strong in the house of Saul. Now Saul had a concubine whose name was Ritzpah, the daughter of Aiya. 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. 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.

[2 : 33] 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 until you first bring Mishal, Saul's daughter, when you come to see me, see my face. Then David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, saying, give me my wife, Mishal, 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. So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace. Just then the servants of David arrived from 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 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.

When Joab came out from David's presence, he sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from the cistern of Sirah. 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 Asahel 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.

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 Asahel to death in the battle of Gibeon. Then David said to Joab and to all the people who were with him, tear your clothes, and put on sackcloth, and mourn before 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 who falls, 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. 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. And the king said to his servants, Do you not know what a prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel? And I was gentle today, though anointed king. These men, the sons of

[7 : 05] Zeruiah, are more severe than I. The Lord repay the evildoer according to his wickedness. This is God's word. God. Thank you, Daniel, for taking the burden of a long text today. Well done.

Now you want to come preach it? I know he would. That's the funny thing. Say, I'll do it. Thank you.

Looking at large portions of Scripture. That's not to say that a sermon can't be on a verse or two, but in a historical narrative from the scene beginning to the scene ending, there's a message in that. Every story has a point, and it takes some time to recalibrate into that historical narrative mindset. So we're in chapter three. You guys should be pros by now.

But you could probably feel the weight of the length of this text. But my job is very burdensome to explain that story, to look at this and expose to us today God's message so that He speaks and not I.

And I want to ask you a question relating to being misrepresented. This text is full of it. And most of us have experienced what it's like to be misrepresented by someone who speaks or acts on our behalf.

- [9 : 14] Being misrepresented. Come on, you all went through high school or some sort of adolescent stage. You know exactly what I'm talking about. Being misrepresented. Someone uses your name, your position, or maybe your authority.
- But what they do is they leverage your name or your authority or your position only to falsely represent you and your heart, your values or your intentions.
- Any parents here today with kids or maybe kids that are out of the nest? You know what I'm talking about. But mom said I could, right? No. Suddenly you're being judged from your spouse of something that you never authorized to do.
- It wasn't part of your heart. It was all the false intentions of those seeking to advance their own agenda. And being misrepresented is something that hits close to home.
- And so the question is, have you all been through that in a certain degree or one another? I think it's a human problem. No matter if you're in grade school or a nursing home.
- [10 : 28] I think it's a problem in a nursing home. I don't know. It's a good question. But the experience is frustrating. That's talking from a pastoral position, but it can be frustrating from some of you own your own business and manage a team of people.
- It's frustrating when that happens. And at the very tension within this passage is the heart of 2 Samuel 3, being that misrepresentation.
- This chapter is filled with people who speak the language of God, of the language of His kingdom. They act in God's name and claim loyalty to God's chosen king, yet whose actions distort what the kingdom is actually all about.
- Last week we asked a question as the main point. Are we strong enough to submit to the king? Are we strong enough to submit to the king?
- And this week the text presses actually further into that. And it's kind of like a wound that I opened last week. And now we're digging our finger in it.
- [11 : 44] And we're really going to think about this a little bit. ER doctors are like, amen, yeah, digging that wound. Let's feel it. Because we're going to see further the painful reality of what happens when strength refuses that submission.
- And the text before us today is a kingdom crisis. Because when servants begin to act independently of the king as kind of rogues in this nation, the kingdom itself becomes confused.
- It's an identity crisis, isn't it? What are the values of the kingdom? Who's in charge here? Right? Becomes confused, distorted, and misrepresented.
- And that all leads to a central truth and what we might call the main point today. Is that God's kingdom is defined by the king, not by his servants.
- God's kingdom is defined by the king, not by his servants. God's kingdom is defined by the king, not by his servants. We just read, Abner will try to define the kingdom by control.
- [12 : 55] Joab will try to define it by force. And David quietly, publicly, and at great cost shows us that only the king has the right to define what God's kingdom truly looks like.
- Who's in charge? For that, the sermon title today is, Who Defines the Kingdom? And I know that I just answered that question, but I want this question to be something within the archives of your notes and your sermon notes that you go back and you see this title and you remember the answer to that.
- Because it is simple, but it is yet profound. So let's pray as we go into this first section, looking upon Abner's situation.
- Let's pray. Father, we come to you needing for you to speak. Father, I am weak and your word is strong.

Father, I am weak and your word is strong. Father, I am weak and your word is strong. Help your word to do the heavy lifting today. Change us, Lord. Allow us to be transformed completely, no matter how the condition of what we came.

[14 : 29] We praise in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. I have three sections and I'm going to allow each character sort of dominate each section.

And so the first section is looking at a kingdom distorted by control. And this is looking at Abner. Abner's story takes 21 verses to tell. The chapter opens in verse 1 by reminding us that the house of David seems to be distinct.

God's chosen initiative in this nation, it seems to be advancing. It says that. We're told that there's six sons born in Hebron.

And the point isn't necessarily to say, well, congratulations, family expansion, right?

Get that bigger house. They're coming. But it's actually kingdom momentum, right? David's house is increasing. Why is it increasing?

[15 : 44] Why does he have these sons? Well, it's because that's what God promised to David. We see this unfolding of God's promise from verse 4 to 5.

But it seems like the motive of the author of this is immediately turning our attention away from David. Saying, yeah, the kingdom is growing over here, but we got some problems here.

It turns attention towards Abner, the commander of Saul's army, the side which is growing weaker as opposed to the strength of David's house.

And this is an intentional shift. While David's strength grows quietly under the hand of God in Judah, Abner is described as actively strengthening himself, not a nation, within the house of Saul.

Last week, we saw that Abner's first move of strength was to replace the king of Saul's house with Ish-bosheth, right?

[16 : 50] That's a good baby name. Any mothers carrying children? Yeah, Ish-bosheth. Think about it. I got a no from a mother. Another mother that's like, please save me.

Have this baby. He appointed Ish-bosheth as king over Saul's house. But the tension was that the nation of God's nation already had a king.

And Abner, the one who appointed Ish-bosheth as king of Saul's house, knew that David was the anointed king.

He says it in chapter 3 here. So that's the tension. And so you have Abner here who's appointing a king for a kingdom already with a king.

And he also begins to live as though he himself holds royal authority. And we're told that he does this by taking Saul's concubine.

[17 : 50] Now, in the ancient world, doing something like that, this was closely connected to questions of power, of authority, of inheritance, of legitimacy.

And Scripture records that this practice and concubine stuff is a cultural reality of that time, right? It's not God's design or his moral ideal.

It's not endorsing concubines, right? The significance here is not sexual immorality and like, how could he have a concubine? But in this context, it's actually about authority.

There's an issue of authority. This act signals a public claim over Saul's house that Abner's got the authority.

Even though he appointed Ish-bosheth, he still has this control. And that's why Ish-bosheth confronts Abner in verse 7. Not because he has suddenly become morally sensitive, that that's wrong to even have a concubine.

[19 : 00] But it's because he recognized that what Abner's initiative, what Abner's actions represents, this is about control.

It's a power play. And so in verse 8, Abner's response to Ish-bosheth is explosive. He erupts in anger in verse 8. How dare you question me?

And then almost shockingly, Abner acknowledges what he has known all along. This is the million-dollar notice here, that the Lord has sworn the kingdom to David.

He knows. He openly confesses that David is the true king. And we see here in verse 10. It is to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and set it over the throne of David, over Israel, and over all Judea, from Dan to Beersheba.

This is encompassing the entire nation is to be transferred under the kingship of David. And in that moment, I believe the author is laying Abner's heart bare for us.

[20 : 23] He wants us to see something going on here. You see, Abner speaks God's promise correctly.

He probably got some amens to that. Not from Ish-bosheth, because he probably feels like a pointless servant. What am I here for, right? He speaks God's promise correctly.

But he lives as though the kingdom cannot move forward without Abner. And that is how servants, unfortunately, quietly behind the scenes replace the king.

The text doesn't leave that as a mere theory for us to like, well, you might be right, Brent. Maybe he had a power struggle.

I mean, obviously, we don't have the context following this passage. We don't know. He probably repented at that point. This was a confession. He repented. He laid it all down and submitted to the king.

[21 : 32] But the author gives us a lengthy description that Abner was really full of himself and self-encompassed, self-entitled to his own power, self-serving his needs and his desire for control.

The text doesn't leave this as a theory. Watch what Abner does next. From verse, I'm going to go quickly through this section, because it's like, look at this. We just read it, despite his self-serving posture.

In verse 12 to 13, Abner successfully negotiates the transfer of power. There's a phrase out there that goes, you know, God can use crooked sticks to make straight lines, something along those lines.

And that's certainly true here. Abner successfully negotiates the transfer of power with David in verse 12 and 13. And David receives the kingdom's movement forward with a contingency that his first wife might rightfully be returned to him.

And you might ask, well, doesn't he have enough wives? We just heard of half a dozen of them with the sons, right?

[22 : 52] Well, we'll see the fall of David towards the end of 2 Samuel and the mess that is created in that. But that's like the looming tension. But regardless, right here in time, in history, his wife, his first wife is returned lawfully.

And that's in verse 14 and 16. And then Abner, this man full of control, God knows his heart. And David's like, all right, well, this has to happen.

I guess this is how it's going to be taking place. Abner meets with all Israel to prepare themselves for unity. I mean, he's running for the Nobel Peace Prize, isn't he?

Abner, the man making everything happen. And to put the icing on the cake, verse 20 and 21, he has a feast with David.

Let's celebrate peace. Abner is a broker of peace. Peace. Man. You see, on the surface, everything appears to be working.

- [24 : 06] But there's a heart issue. There's a danger here. Abner knows the promise. He speaks the language of God's kingdom, rallies God's people, and yet still believes that he must make it happen. And this is where the text really presses us today. Church, the Abner problem is not obviously open rebellion, but it's conditional submission. Like, I know God's going to consolidate this power to David. I know that's going to happen. And let's make sure that I get a slice of the pie, too. That I get the promotion over in David's house as well. Obedience. This is obedience. Conditional submission is obedience that says yes to God as long as we remain central and we remain essential.
- [25 : 12] Right? We live in a deeply human-centered world. I don't know if that's a public service announcement. It's basically everywhere. And we organize our lives. We organize our homes, our lives, the completeness of our lives, and even our faith around this assumption that everything depends upon us. That woe to our families if we fall over and die. Everything would fall apart. We are strong. When we're strong, we hold things together. When we falter and we have our bad days, everything falls apart and unravels. And at some point, we have to ask this uncomfortable question. Since when did God's purposes hinge upon our indispensability?
- [26 : 17] That's a good question to ask. It's a good question for your lead pastor to ask. And every lead pastor this morning in a pulpit. Often, often we don't realize that. And sort of we quietly structured our lives around this unspoken subtleness that everything does depend upon us. See, the danger is not that God's word is rejected. Because God's word is affirmed everywhere here through Abner. It's being worked out. So it's not that God's word is rejected, but that it is affirmed while still being displaced from the center. So God's word, which ought to be center, is moved to the outside. And when God's word is no longer the sustaining authority of our homes, of our marriages, or our parenting, the weight shifts upon us. And friends, that is a weight that we are not created to carry in your homes, your marriages, and your parenting.
- [27 : 55] This is the Abner issue. God's will is acknowledged. You're amending it, but only on our terms to preserve control over the plans. So the remedy is not trying harder to hold things together. This isn't moralism. The remedy is actually yielding and allowing God's word, not our strength, to bear the weight it was always meant to bear. Abner shows us the danger of agreeing with God while refusing to step aside. Obedience to God requires living dispensably. Obedience requires living dispensably. Being replaceable. It's completely countercultural to worldly ways. Church, do not continue in the way of Abner. His story reminds us that conditional submission is not faith.
- [28 : 59] Abner does not have a bit of faith there. Maybe a little bit mustard seed of faith. And that God's kingdom does not depend upon our centrality, but His. Notice how this section ends. Look with me in verse 21. Abner leaves David in peace. Shalom.

Wholeness of peace. Completeness of peace. But the question lingers, is this substantial peace? Or is this sort of like superficial stuff?

Well, we got to keep going. The author isn't leaving us with too many unanswered questions. Let's look at section two, where we see a kingdom driven by vengeance. And this is looking at Joab.

From verse 22 through 27. Verse 27. This section exposes a sobering theological reality about peace.

[30 : 08] It is impossible for peace to truly be deeply established where there is unresolved sin. Peace is fragile wherever unresolved sin is allowed to masquerade as righteousness.

We see in verse 22 through 23, Joab returns from some battle. Obviously, Joab, that kind of says a lot about Joab's personality.

Some battle, he brings back the stuff that he acquired. And immediately upon returning, he learns about Abner hanging out with David.

Now, this is no small detail. Abner is not just a political rival of Joab. But this man, Abner, is responsible for the death of Joab's brother.

And we learned that last week. The wound is still open. And this is very, very personal. In verse 24, look with me.

[31 : 18] It says, These words are striking.

These words echo the very words that Samuel confronted Saul with. And when he was disobedient to the Lord, offering sacrifices from his own hand.

What have you done? And now God's king is being confronted with the same rebuke. Boy, this is upside down.

Verse 24, we see Joab presents himself. He is the guardian of the kingdom's security. He's got a little bit of an Abner problem as well.

He frames his anger as a concern, though. He casts suspicion of wisdom. He sort of is presumptuous.

[32 : 24] And Abner, he insists, is deceiving David. But the text reveals that what Joab will not admit. The text reveals it.

This is not zeal for the kingdom. This is vengeance that's baptized as loyalty. He's in it for himself. He's got his own agenda. And he's just going to do it in God's name.

And put God's name, his trademark, at the end of his agenda. And say, God's called me to do this, right? So without David's knowledge, Joab sends messengers after Abner.

He brings them back quietly and privately. Now remember, shalom, peace, has already been declared. The icing on the cake has been placed.

The feast has taken place. Abner has been sent away in shalom. And it is precisely there, at the gate of peace, that Joab murders Abner.

[33 : 32] This isn't a death in battle. This wasn't justice carried out by authority. This was vengeance executed after reconciliation.

In fact, you won't know at the end of this series what this does in Joab's life. But this is a regrettable act that catches up with Joab in 1 Kings 2.

You see, Joab assumes that the kingdom's survival depends on his strength. Even when that strength contradicts the king's character. And this is another terrifying moment for us as well.

Because Joab acts in the king's name while acting against the king's will and against the king's character. Joab's doing what he wants.

And by him doing what he wants, he's completely redefining what the king's all about. Right? He assumes that urgency excuses disobedience.

[34 : 45] And that danger authorizes this deviation from the king's plans and the king's character. And that righteousness can be achieved without trust.

And church, you might say, Man, I can't believe how Joab would do such a thing. Well, not so fast, church. This isn't just an ancient temptation.

It's not. We do the same thing when we justify un-Christ-like behavior in our lives in the name of Christ-like causes. You might say, Well, the anger can be excused because the truth was at stake.

And justify away. Or that harshness is defended, justified. Well, that was a little bit harsh. But the situation was just too serious for gentleness.

Really had to lean in on this one. Or whenever hastiness is tolerated because someone just had to act, if no one was going to act, who would?

[35 : 52] And this is justifying un-Christ-like behavior in the name of Christ-like causes. We're really good justifiers, church. I'm a really good justifier.

Right? For many, without realizing it, we do this a lot. More than we realize. Many for us speak for the king, but we no longer sound like the king.

How shameful it would be if the walls in our home could actually speak.

What if our kids could come up and testify to Christ-like? To Christ-likeness in our home. What about your co-workers?

If your co-workers came in. For many, without even realizing it, the king's name slowly becomes merely a banner that we wave while his character is set aside.

[37 : 10] Joab teaches us something very sobering here. It is possible to be passionately committed to the kingdom and yet profoundly out of step with the king.

All Joab needed to do was yield to the king. To surrender wholly to the king. He didn't take that moment, but I pray that you do today when you leave here.

This is what happens when servants try to define the kingdom instead of trusting the king. The true king, King Jesus. The one who laid himself down, laid his own will down on behalf of those he came to save.

So the question now presses in on us. What does the king do when his kingdom is misrepresented like this? What does he do? The author says, let me show you.

Let's see his response. We see a kingdom defined by the king. Let's look at David's story. David's response is immediate and unmistakably public.

[38 : 40] He declares himself and the king guiltless before the Lord. In verse 28. And this is strong legal language. He's clearly drawing a very firm line between the actions of Joab and the character of the king.

This is strong legal language. David is formally separating the character of the kingdom from the vile actions of Job. It almost sounds like church discipline in the Old Testament of what happens here.

David is teaching Israel that vengeance is not loyal to the king. Practicing vengeance is not kingdom loyalty. It's not. It's rebellion against the king.

It's actually the opposite. Whatever grace is in your own definition, it's the opposite of grace. It's giving people what they deserve. Grace is giving people what they don't deserve.

This is a truth, unfortunately, of vengeance, manipulation, and control that David is going to sadly figure out in the middle of 2 Samuel.

- [39 : 55] And we'll see it unfold and unravel. In verse 29, this king in this moment though, he reinforces this separation by pronouncing judgment upon Joab's house.
- similar to what the prophet Nathan will do to David later on. And the narrator even pauses to explain why. You might say, okay, what was the intention behind Joab killing Abner?
- Well, he says it here in verse 30. Joab's actions were not an unfortunate mistake. They were calculated vengeance, a direct contradiction to the will of the king.
- He was unauthorized. In verse 31, then comes this public moment that Joab could not escape. David commands all the people in verse 31, including Joab himself, to participate in Abner's funeral.
- Imagine that humiliation for Joab, Mr. Vengeance Man. Sackcloth, mourning, tears, the whole nine yards.
- [41 : 10] Joab, you can lead the charge. It's deliberately humiliating. The king refuses to allow private sin to define public identity.
- David's lament actually deepens further. Abner's death as the death of a fool, not reflecting Abner's intelligence, but actually Joab's intelligence for acting unauthorized in this.
- And now that's not to say that Abner was anything to brag about, right? He's this control freak. This guy who does power plays, and is just the epitome of politics, and what we hate about politics.
- People having their agendas, and baptizing their agendas, as being the promoters of peace, but they're really just worried about re-election, right? But still, David laments, to the point of refusing to eat in verse 35.
- People are saying, here, take some bread. You don't look too good, buddy. It's like a lot of us doing our fast right now. Wither and away. Take some bread, but he grieves openly, and there's something that God uses in this.
- [42 : 37] Because of genuine grief of David, the people begin to see that this king, David, is not like the king, the kings of all those other nations.
- This king is unique, different, motivated differently, not by power, but through submission, through grief over the loss.
- of others. And verse 39, the chapter culminates with David's defining statement. He says, I was gentle today, though anointed king.
- Now, he's not explaining himself. He's not saying, look at me. But he is revealing the kind of king that God has chosen.
- Gentle king. Despite your cultural stereotypes of gentleness, this isn't saying that David is weak. A lot of people that have an issue with the gentleness of Christ and everything.
- [43 : 49] Well, he's the victor. He comes with his robe dipped in blood, fire in his eyes, and here he comes. But he's not just the lion. He's the lamb as well.
- David was a mighty warrior, but he was gentle today. He had the authority to actually put Joab to death for murder, but he's gentle.
- Isn't God the same with us? When we act on our own accord, on our own behalf, isn't it by our faith in Jesus Christ that we come to him, knowing exactly who we are, knowing our deeds, confessing like we did today, along with Wilbur Wilberforce from centuries ago, the same grace of our mighty God found in Jesus Christ.
- Jesus is gentle, the gentle lamb that conquers our sin like a lion. Praise the Lord. This is not weakness.
- This is authority properly exercised. True authority in God's kingdom is not proven by force. But it's actually proven by restraints.

[45 : 26] We've been seeing this unfold since last week. Because we know unrighteous methods will crumble one day. Right? I love how John MacArthur was once asked a question similar to what this is getting at here.

He was asked, how much authority does the pastor have in the lives of the congregation? And here's the, you know, John MacArthur.

I mean, this guy, I wouldn't want to get into a debate with him. I don't know. He wants to be dispensational with his theology. That's fine. I'm not. And I'm not going to argue with him because I'll probably leave crying.

Right? His answer to this woman, he said, the pastor doesn't have authority. He has no authority over the congregation.

Experience, knowledge, education, the letters after your name, position, titles, they don't give authority. And he says, only the word of God has authority and we cannot exceed what is written.

[46 : 45] It's sobering because that's simply to say pastors have no authority of their own, but they are to exercise real authority when they teach, when they apply, when they lead.

according to scripture, under the lordship of Christ and with the accountability of the church. David defines that here fairly well.

And what a rescue for them in this day. And what a rescue for us today. God draws a clear line between his king and those who misrepresent him.

Not for damage control, but to protect the identity of the kingdom. It made me think that many people that I've talked to do not reject Jesus Christ because they've seen him clearly.

I think most people who have been converted to Christ convert because they've seen him clearly. But those who reject Christ don't reject because they've seen him clearly.

[48 : 04] They reject Christ because they've seen his servants. They reject Christ because they saw those Christians. Wounded by hypocrisy, maybe wounded by cruelty, or sin done in the name of Christ's name, and things brushed under the rug, no accountability, and they quietly assume, well, the king must be like that, and if the king is like that, I want nothing to do with it.

Large majority of knowns today are in that category. David refuses the confusion.

Though he's deeply flawed, he's nothing to brag about, we'll find that out quickly, but his life still points beyond the servants to the hope of a better king.

There's something better coming, and if you're not a Christian today, this is grace for you to actually hold and own today, that your unbelief may not rebel against Jesus, but realize that your unbelief has been a reaction to his people, not to Jesus.

This text invites you to see past the broken lives of sometimes really poor servants of the Lord, to see past broken servants and see and behold and own the goodness of Christ himself and the grace that he offers that is so good, so beautiful, and so unwavering.

[49 : 48] Don't trust servants, trust in Christ. May for those who belong to Christ, this passage really explains why the church must continually work away from sin, not to appear more impressive, but to remain faithful.

This is why the local church must draw and naturally draws a line of accountability. Like, you might think of church discipline as a way of holding one another accountable to not going rogue as Joab or Abner, right?

It's not cruelty to have the existence of church discipline. We see it even happening way back here. It's not cruelty, it's clarity. And that's the role and the opportunity that it has.

It protects the witness of the king by refusing to let unrepented sin speak for his kingdom. It's to protect the witness of God's kingdom.

God's kingdom. By now, you could probably imagine the world we live in. We live in an Abner and Joab world.

[51 : 09] I mean, everything, even down to the very minor motives of these two guys, this is literally a snapshot of our culture today. This passage explains why the church must continually work away from sin.

And we see that these servants disappoint, they misrepresent, they wound, they do all of these things that still exist today. And many people have judged the king by those servants in this day, but the king himself has not changed.

And he remains still today worthy of our trust. And so, the question as it's stated in the sermon title, who defines God's kingdom?

Who defines the kingdom? We know the answer to this. And it's easy to affirm it here in our midst, but when we go out into the Abner and the Joab world, find ourselves tripping up, even ourselves in some of the struggles, you have to be reinforced with the reality that God alone defines his kingdom.

God alone, through his word. And Jesus does not ask us to trust because his servants are flawless, but because they are faithful.

[52 : 35] He is calling us to be faithful. And so, the question that I want to leave you with today is will you trust him? From this day forward, maybe for the first time today, you're like, I need to get this thing together.

And praise the Lord for that. Maybe it's the hundredth time that you're trusting him. If you're like me, will you trust him? See, God's kingdom is defined by the king, not servants, because he's gentle, righteous, he's good, he's worthy of our trust.

Amen. Amen. Let's pray.