

2 Samuel 2:8-4:12 | “Power, Politics, and Promises”
Preached on July 24, 2022 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to 2 Samuel 2:8 and surprisingly, we will be going all the way through chapter 4.

That means that this morning, I’ll be covering almost 3 chapters of 2 Samuel. *[pause]*

As you know, this isn’t my typical practice, but there are certain times where working through a larger chunk of Scripture helps us to see things that we wouldn’t see so clearly by zooming in.

And I hope that you’ll see what I mean as we work our way through it. *[pause]*

Now because I’m covering such a lengthy section, what I’ll do when it comes to the stories is that I will recount the stories for you...

...But then there will also be times when there’s a section which is especially important, so I’ll read it for you. *[pauseeee]*

Our text this morning entails a lot of political power struggles, and so it’s not too different from our day, is it?

We are used to hearing about power, politics, and promises, aren’t we?

Especially around election time, that’s sort of all we hear about.

Both major parties in our country are vying for power, and they make power plays in order to get ahead of the other party.

They try to use their power in order to strategically gain an advantage.

Maybe they will put someone forward who will advance their own interests, or something like that.

Or they will highlight a certain topic in order to garner more votes. *[pause]*

Well what we see in our big section this morning is political power plays, and when you boil it down, you realize that their world wasn’t too different from our own. *[pauseeee]*

If you remember from last week, Saul has died, and there was a void in the kingship in Israel.

So David was finally made king, but he was only made king of Judah.

And this situation led one man to institute his plan, and his name was Abner. *[pause]*

Abner was Saul’s cousin and the commander of his army.¹

¹ See 1 Samuel 14:50-51.

So he was a pretty high up, powerful guy when Saul died, and he uses that to his advantage to make a political power move...

He makes Saul's son, Ish-bosheth, king of Israel.

Let's READ 2 Samuel 2:8-9 to see it. *[pauseeee]*

This was big, as it went directly against what God had proclaimed and what God wanted - it was rebellion against God Himself.

Now there are two competing kings (David and Ish-bosheth) and therefore two competing kingdoms in Israel.

Meaning, this is sort of like a civil war type of period.

And the rest of our big section will show that as we see different situations and conflicts happening. *[pause]*

So before we go further, let's get these facts in our mind. [\[pull up SLIDE\]](#)

There is now David who is king of the tribe of Judah, but then there's Saul's son (Ish-bosheth), who is king of the rest of Israel.

And two main guys will be highlighted in these stories, and it's each of the king's top commanders.

You have Abner, who we just talked about, and then you have a man named Joab, who is David's main commander, and nephew.²

And the conflict between Abner and Joab will now be the focus. *[pauseeee]*

Abner brings the Israelite army over to Gibeon, and Joab brings the army of Judah and meets them at this pool.

They sit opposite each other and Abner proposes that the best fighters from each side would fight each other, and Joab agrees to this.

Twelve men from each side fight each other and look there at chapter 2, verse 16: "And each caught his opponent by the head and thrust his sword in his opponent's side, so they fell down together." *[pause]*

Well that didn't go too far, did it? It ends in a stalemate.

But then there seems to be war that breaks out of this, for verse 17 says, "And the battle was very fierce that day. And Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David."

[pause]

² See 1 Chronicles 2:13-16.

Not going well for Abner and Israel is it? *[pauseeee]*

The writer then gives us an interesting story that's a part of this battle.

LET'S READ, STARTING IN VERSE 18. *[READ VERSES 18-23]*

This Asahel who died was the brother of Joab, so obviously this makes Joab furious and Joab pursues Abner for a while.

But then a bunch of Abner's army gathers to him and Abner essentially gets Joab to stop pursuing him, for they are all fellow Israelites.

So both leaders and their respective armies go their separate ways, and chapter 2 ends. *[pauseeee]*

Chapter 3 starts off with an important note, as it states...

"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." *[pause]*

So we see that this civil war conflict wasn't a short-lived skirmish, but was a long war between the house of Saul and David.

David keeps getting stronger, but the house of Saul gets weaker.

In fact, the writer gives us all the sons born to David while he was at Hebron to show us that his family is growing, too.

Things are going well for David and not so good for Ish-bosheth, as we see what happens next. *[pause]*

Ish-bosheth accuses Abner of sleeping with his father's concubine, and this leads Abner to make another political power play.

He defects and joins David. *[pause]*

Look there at 2 Samuel 3:9-11, as he says, "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." *[pauseeee]*

Ouch, that's gotta hurt Ish-bosheth - his commander has joined the other side, and he's so fearful of this guy that he can't say a word.

Like I said, things are not going well for Ish-bosheth. *[pauseeee]*

It's interesting that this whole time Abner knew about the promise of God to give the kingdom to David, yet he's the very one who made someone else king.

I believe that just shows us that Abner is mostly just a political player, seeking out whatever benefits him the most.

He probably sees the writing on the wall of Ish-bosheth getting weaker, and David getting stronger, and he wants to use switching sides to see if he can get a high up position in David's court. *[pauseee]*

What we find next is that Abner wasn't just messing around, for he actually deserts and contacts David to tell him that he wants to come over to his side.

Yet David is shrewd and he uses this moment to get his first wife, Michal, back. *[pause]*

Remember that Saul gave her away to some other man while he was in the wilderness.³

And so David reaches out and tells Ish-bosheth to give Michal to him, and Ish-bosheth is so weakened politically and out of options that he just gives her over. *[pause]*

Abner then uses his political power to start convincing the Israelite elders to back David.

He then meets with David and they have a good time, and Abner tells him that he's going to go get everyone to unite under him.

David likes this and sends Abner in peace, but there's someone who doesn't like this idea: Joab. *[pause]*

Remember that Joab is one of David's top commanders and so he probably sees Abner as a threat to his position, and he's also bitter about Abner killing his brother.

And he confronts David and says that Abner is simply spying, and just listen what happens next, starting in chapter 3, verse 26...[READ VERSES 26-30]

Talk about a series of events!

Abner thought all was going well, only to be stabbed in the stomach by Joab.

But David wants to make it clear that he is innocent when it comes to Abner's death, and he takes measures to do just that.

He makes Joab and all the other people with him to mourn Abner and David is very visible at the funeral, mourns him, and laments his death.

He even doesn't eat for a while, emphasizes that he has been a gentle king, and everyone recognizes that he didn't play a part in killing off Abner. *[pauseee]*

³ See 1 Samuel 25:44.

So David was innocent of Abner's death, but there's something else that he's innocent of: Ish-bosheth's death, which is found in chapter 4.

In chapter 4, we find two brothers who were captains of raiding parties for Ish-bosheth, and their names were: Baanah and Rechab

They also determine to make a political power move, and it's a big one.

Let's READ what they do, beginning in 2 Samuel 4:5...[*READ verses 5-8*]

These two brothers use their position to be able to stealthily kill off king Ish-bosheth.

They saw the potential for great political advantage by killing off David's rival.

They think that they will be greatly rewarded for killing off David's enemy, but they were greatly mistaken.

Just listen to what David does following this in verse 9. [*READ VERSES 9-12*]

Now that's definitely not the reaction that the two brothers were expecting!

They were expecting reward, recognition, and possibly high up positions, but the only high up position that they received was being hung by the pool at Hebron. [*pause*]

David was showing himself to once again be a man who doesn't approve of killing off rivals.

He showed it with the man who claimed to kill Saul, he showed it with Abner's death, and now here.

David's actions in dealing with Ish-bosheth's killers was a display to all of Israel that he didn't approve of their actions and that he was innocent of it.

After this, David is finally made king of *all* of Israel. [*pause*]

OK, that was chapters 2, 3, and 4.

I know that was a lot and we went through it fast, but what do we get out of all these stories of political intrigue, murder, and conflict?

First...

I. God's kingdom prevails, no matter what human political chaos there is!

In our country, there is certainly political chaos.

Candidates try smear campaigns in order to hurt the other candidates' chances at victory.

We hear of accusations flying from both sides.

We hear of impeachments, and of possible legal action.

We see parties trying to push something through while they have power.

We see one thing after the other, and we see and feel how chaotic it can be.

And after going through this section of 2 Samuel, we felt the political chaos in Israel. *[pause]*

We saw a civil war conflict going on because Abner decided to make Saul's son king.

We saw an accusation which led to Abner defecting to the other side.

We saw the death of Joab's brother, which leads Joab to murder Abner in revenge.

And we saw Ish-bosheth killed in his sleep because two men thought they were advancing their careers.

Talk about human political chaos!

Just when you think things will calm down, they get crazy again. *[pause]*

We think our American politics are filled with chaos (and they are), but just look at what happened in Israel.

Yet through all of this political chaos, what was the end result?

God's king and God's kingdom prevailed. *[pause]*

Oh, what a comforting truth that that is!

God's kingdom prevails, no matter what human political chaos there is!

Ish-bosheth's kingdom reflects the kingdoms of this world, and David's kingdom is God's kingdom.

And we know the end result! God's kingdom always prevails in the end. *[pause]*

Though David's kingdom looked small and weak at the beginning, yet his kingdom prevailed.

God always ultimately wins, no matter what the beginning and middle looks like.

Through all of the human political chaos, God's purposes move forward to perfection. *[pauseeee]*

Abner thought he was coming up with a great plan to institute Saul's son as king, but it was doomed from the start.

He thought he was making a decision that would be advantageous for him...

...But how quickly he saw how short-lived and futile it was, and had to simply defect and point to God's promise.

When you go up against God's purposes only expect failure. *[pauseee]*

This reminds us that those in our world pulling the political strings are mere puffs of smoke, whose work will quickly be gone when God blows the winds of His will. *[pause]*

This reminds me of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2.

Remember how he sees this great image made up of different metals, which symbolize powerful nations?

But what happens in the end?

A stone comes and strikes the image and breaks it in pieces, and they become like chaff, so that the wind carries them away, with no trace of them anymore.

And what's Daniel's interpretation of this? He says...

"And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever."⁴ *[pause]*

God's kingdom will pulverize the kingdoms of this world and *His* kingdom will stand.

And if you have trusted in Jesus Christ, you are called into this kingdom! *[pause]*

Isn't this such a good, encouraging word for us as we see political chaos all around us?

We can hold firm onto the anchor of this truth, and never let go. *[pause]*

As we see the ups and downs of human politics in this world, we know the end result.

As we see political power plays at work, we know whose might ultimately reigns over all.

As we see a political party that we don't like growing in power, we know that their power isn't ultimate.

And as we look at nations like Russia or China, we don't have to worry about who will take them down, for we know ultimately who will. *[pause]*

We don't have to fear them, we don't have to tremble at the circumstances of this world.

We don't have to wonder what the eventual outcome will be, for our God has told us the end. *[pauseeeee]*

⁴ Daniel 2:44. (See Daniel 2:31-45 for the context).

When we let the human political situations of this world overtake us in fear, we are being short-sighted and lacking faith.

We aren't viewing our world with eyes of faith as a child of the great God of Heaven and Earth, whose kingdom will prevail.

Instead, we are acting like God won't rule, that He won't win, that He isn't faithful to His promises.

But just look at what God did here in these chapters, rejoice and believe!

Even amid political chaos, God's will moved steadily along and even used that chaos to do His bidding. *[pauseee]*

David didn't do anything spectacular to lead all of Israel to unite under him.

But God in His providence showed off His powerful arm, even using the enemy's forces against itself.

He used Ish-bosheth's commander to sway large portions of Israel under David, and used two of Ish-bosheth's raiding captains to put the nail in the coffin. *[pauseee]*

No human kingdom can ultimately defeat God's kingdom!

What a joy it is to serve the God who never loses!

What glorious hope that we have, for we are a part of a kingdom that will endure forever.

Though it doesn't look like it now with all the political chaos in our world, trust that His kingdom will prevail. *[pauseee]*

Not only does His kingdom prevail, but also, we see in this section of Scripture that...

II. God's kingdom doesn't come by human might and means, but by His power and promises!

Throughout history, mankind has sought power through different means.

Just think of how power was gained during the Roman Empire.

If a certain powerful group didn't like how someone was ruling, they would just kill them off.

They would use their power to get what they wanted, and so they believed that human might could attain the kingdom. *[pause]*

Well Rome isn't alone in this thinking, for all throughout human history you see this idea at work.

Just think of our text in front of us: wasn't it a trust in human might and means that led to all the chaos? *[pause]*

Abner used his power to set up Saul's son as king, and then tried to battle his way to victory against David's army.

Abner then used his power to switch sides most likely to secure a better future.

Joab used his power to seek revenge against Abner.

The two brothers who killed Ish-bosheth tried to use human might and means to secure positions in David's kingdom.

Our world's way to power is through human might and means. *[pauseeee]*

I found one article from the *Harvard Business Review* that explained that we shouldn't shy away from power, that we shouldn't see it as bad at all, for it works.

The author of the article even went so far as to give some tips to gaining power, one of which was to remove your rivals.

He even talked about using resources to build your power, saying, "(Think of it as a new golden rule: The person with the gold gets to make the rules.)"⁵ *[pauseeee]*

Our world's kingdom ways are through political power plays, force, murder, and revenge.

All of these things have one thing in common: they are devoid of God and reliant upon man. *[pause]*

But what's the result of man seeking power through themselves?

First, it's ultimately *futile*.

It may work temporarily, but not ultimately.

Abner's power plays worked a little bit, but they eventually failed.

Joab's revenge-filled murder seemed helpful, but he received public embarrassment, and eventually was killed by Solomon according to David's instruction at the end of his life.⁶ *[pause]*

Ish-bosheth's whole reign was characterized by human power plays, but it was a doomed attempt.

God always has the last word, and human might and means don't pay off. *[pauseeee]*

We also see that human might and means cause great *ruin*.

⁵ Pfeffer, Jeffrey. "Power Play." *Harvard Business Review*, 2010, <https://hbr.org/2010/07/power-play>.

⁶ See 1 Kings 2:5-6, 28-34.

Just look at the ruin caused in these chapters...

Abner's defiant kingmaking led to a civil war.

Joab's revenge led to a murder deserving of blood guilt.

The two brothers' ambition led to the unapproved killing of Ish-bosheth.

Division, death, chaos, and bloodshed were all the result of human might and means. *[pause]*

Isn't that what we see in our world?

A nation unjustifiably invades another country using their human might and it leads to death and destruction.

A political party tries a political power play only to cause the people of the country to suffer.

Human might and means may be our world's way, but it doesn't ultimately work and it just causes issues. *[pauseeee]*

So then if human might and means aren't the way, what is the way?

God's power and promises!

David wasn't made king of Judah, or even of all Israel through human might.

He was made king through God's power and promises! *[pause]*

When David finally is made king of all of Israel in chapter 5, the elders of Israel have to admit to David, "The Lord said to you, 'You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.'"⁷ *[pause]*

Ish-bosheth's rise and fall was based on human power plays, but David's rise to kingship was based on divine promises.

God's kingdom comes by promise, not by human force! *[pause]*

David showed why he should truly be king for he didn't trust in human might and means to get the throne, but trusted the Lord who redeemed his life out of every adversity. *[pause]*

Isn't this just like Christ?

He didn't come to this earth and use human might to procure salvation.

Instead, like David, he was an innocent, gentle king who secured victory not by force, but by sacrificial love according to God's promise on the Cross, so that whoever believes in Him will be saved.

⁷ 2 Samuel 5:2.

As Jesus said to Pilate, “[His] kingdom is not of this world.”⁸

And Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount shows this reality, as it’s not the mighty who inherit the kingdom, but rather the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, and the peacemakers.⁹ *[pause]*

God’s kingdom doesn’t come by human might and means, but by His power and promises!

We must evaluate our thinking and actions based on this truth.

In what ways are you trusting human might and means when it comes to God’s kingdom?

Are you trying to manipulate people into changing or are you trusting in God’s power and promises to change hearts?

As a parent, are you trusting in your ability to convince or force your child to change, or are you trusting God’s ways?

As a church, are we trusting in our own methods, programs, and abilities, or are we trusting in God’s ways and promises?

In your personal life, are you trying to be a more godly person by your own effort, or are you relying upon God? *[pause]*

When we look to human might and ingenuity, we are like someone trying to dig a hole with a pool noodle when we have a backhoe on hand.

Let’s not trust in our human might and means, which are futile and cause ruin.

Instead...

Trust the Lord’s ways and promises, for His kingdom is sure.

God’s kingdom will come, it will prevail, and nothing will stop it.

No nation, no politician, and no weapon formed against it will prosper.¹⁰ *[pause]*

Rejoice! No matter what human political chaos we see in this world, we know the outcome.

Revelation 11:15 tells us what will happen as it says, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.”

And after this the twenty four elders worship God saying...

⁸ John 18:36.

⁹ See Matthew 5:1-12.

¹⁰ An allusion to Isaiah 54:17.

“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but your wrath came.”¹¹ *[pause]*

That’s our God! And He has promised the victory!

Christ will reign on earth, make his enemies his footstool, and hand the kingdom over to the Father!¹²

So don’t tremble at the small nations of this world.

Don’t trust in human might and means, like political power plays and strategies. *[pause]*

Our trust isn’t in a new politician, but our trust is in the power and promises of our God.

We don’t change our ways in human ingenuity and might, but we trust the ways that He has laid down.

So rely upon what He has said to do, trust His power, and look with hope to the future.

¹¹ Revelation 11:17-18a.

¹² See 1 Corinthians 15:24-25.