

Sermon Title: “What Has My Heart?”

Series: Seeking God’s Kingdom, Part 34

Scripture: 2 Samuel 3:1-27

Main Takeaway: Seeking God’s Kingdom means surrendering whatever competes for my heart so I can follow the King’s lead.

It’s good to be back in the saddle again!

I have to say, I’m so thankful for our guest speakers.

It’s been amazing to see how God has been speaking to us as a church family...

Both through our Samuel series...

And through what our guest speakers shared.

You know...

When I spoke to Josh a couple weeks before he preached...

I wanted to let him know what we’ve been talking about so he could prepare...

But it turned out that because he was scheduled to speak at several churches...

He already had a sermon prepped.

And so he told me he’d like to preach on: Walking with the Holy Spirit.

I said...

That’s perfect!

Because I was preaching on the presence of God the week before.

Fast forward a little bit...

Amanda and I were in Miami at the BIC conference.

We had just listened to someone preach on the topic of intimacy with God.

Then I got a text from Chris...

And he said to me:

Hey, how about a sermon on building intimacy with God?

I’m only sharing these stories just to show...

God already had a plan!

So let’s reflect on that...

[SLIDE 0] What has God been showing us over the past several weeks?

Well, last month we were challenged to...

[SLIDE 1] Stop, Wait, Listen, Receive Strength, Before Moving forward.

Because when we live life at 100mph,
It's easy to miss what God's doing in our lives.

That's why I preached on Living in the Reality of God's Presence.

When we put our faith in Jesus as our King...
–Our LORD who saves us from our sins
–And adopts us into His forever family
He promises to *always* be with us.

And so the main takeaway from that sermon was this...

[SLIDE 2] The King of all our moments is present with us in every moment.

For example...
We might treat prayer like we're giving God a call...
When the reality is...
He's already in the room!

The sermons from Josh and Chris spoke to that truth in a beautiful way.

Chris reminded us that...

[SLIDE 3] "Whatever has your heart, has you." (Chris Freet)

That really struck me...
Whatever has my heart... has me.

And so that begs the question...
Am I so distracted by the things of the world...

That I'm missing what the LORD is doing right in front of me?

And what will it take for me to slow down...

And simply abide in Jesus?

And when I do slow down...

I know I need to wait patiently on Him.

I know I need to allow room for perseverance to finish its work.

But abiding in the LORD isn't *only* about slowing down.

Josh's message spoke to this.

Near the end of his sermon...

He described a pattern of prayer that goes like this...

[SLIDE 4] "God, give me the wisdom to see your will and the integrity to follow it." [Josh Swartz]

The word "and" is really important.

"Because prayer isn't just about **recognizing** what God's doing...

It's also about **aligning** our understanding, our lives, and our will... with what He's doing."

That speaks directly into our passage today.

In 2 Samuel 3...

One man finally aligns himself with God's will after years of working against it...

And another man lets his desire for revenge cloud his judgment.

Both men had to face a decision...

[SLIDE 5] What has my heart... and where is it leading me?

Because... as Chris said...

Whatever has your heart, has you.

Let's keep that in mind as we go through our passage today.

[SLIDE 6] 2 Samuel 3:1 - The war between the house of Saul and the house of David lasted a long time. David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker.

If you remember the previous chapter,
We saw one of the battles between Judah and the Israelites.

And toward the end of the battle...
Abner, Israel's commander, was starting to feel like enough was enough.
Years of war had taken its toll.

And so at the end of the battle...

[SLIDE 7] 2 Samuel 2:26 - Abner called out to Joab, "Must the sword devour forever? Don't you realize that this will end in bitterness? How long before you order your men to stop pursuing their fellow Israelites?"

I can't know this for sure...
But my guess is that Abner was beginning to feel the weight of conviction.

Think about this...
Abner was Saul's commander for years (probably decades).
Then during the battle against the Philistines, Saul died...
But Abner survived.

And after a few years...
He was able to establish Saul's son, Ish-Bosheth, as the king over Israel.

But something stuck in the back of his mind.

Abner *knew* what the LORD promised David...
He *knew* that it was the LORD's plan to make David the King of Israel.

And yet...
Despite knowing that the LORD wanted David to be on the throne...
Abner kept working against it for years.

This is where Josh's prayer really hits home.
Josh said: "God, give me the wisdom to see your will...
and the integrity to follow it."

And so what I'm seeing with Abner is this...

[SLIDE 7A] It's not enough to just know what God wants. The LORD commands us to follow Him.

This is why, in Matthew 6, Jesus taught His disciples to pray...

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name...
Your kingdom come, **Your will be done**...
On earth as it is in heaven."

When we pray this...
We're aligning ourselves with His will...
And when we do that...
That's when spiritual transformation happens.
That's when we begin to see how we can participate in what the LORD's doing.

But again...
For most of Abner's military career,
He was a lot like Saul.
He knew the LORD's will for David to be on the throne...
But he kept working against what the LORD wanted.

But now...
I have to wonder if his question in chapter 2
is an indication that something's stirring in him?

Must the sword devour forever?

To me...
That feels like the LORD is working on Abner's heart.

But I wonder...

How long will it be before he surrenders his own will to what Yahweh wants?

Look at verse 6...

[SLIDE 8] 2 Samuel 3:6-7 - During the war between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner had been strengthening his own position in the house of Saul. Now Saul had had a concubine named Rizpah daughter of Aiah. And Ish-Bosheth said to Abner, "Why did you sleep with my father's concubine?"

So Abner wasn't just growing in popularity among the Israelites...

He was growing in influence...

Even Ish-Bosheth was afraid of him (v11).

So in his fear...

Ish-Bosheth accuses Abner of a crime.

The commentaries I read said that this was probably more than an attempt to stain his reputation.

Ish-Bosheth was accusing Abner of attempting to steal the throne for himself.

To be fair...

We can't know for sure if Abner was guilty or not...

But let's assume he's innocent.

Imagine how that would've made him feel.

He's been loyal to Saul's family for years...

He's put his life on the line for them...

He's the one who put Ish-Bosheth on the throne...

And *this* is the thanks he gets?

Let's see how he responds...

[SLIDE 9] 2 Samuel 3:8 - Abner was very angry because of what Ish-Bosheth said. So he answered, "Am I a dog's head—on Judah's side?"

This very day I am loyal to the house of your father Saul and to his family and friends. I haven't handed you over to David. Yet now you accuse me of an offense involving this woman!"

Abner was highly offended.

He's been loyal to the house of Saul for years...

But no more.

This was the last straw.

So he decides to pull a complete U-turn on Ish-Bosheth...
He said...

[SLIDE 10] 2 Samuel 3:9-10 - "May God deal with Abner, be it ever so severely, if I do not do for David what the LORD promised him on oath and transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and establish David's throne over Israel and Judah from Dan to Beersheba."

Again, I just found it really interesting
that Abner knew what the LORD promised David all along...
Yet he chose to remain loyal to Saul.

But this is where his heart finally shifted.
His oath is a huge turning point in the narrative.

Because after years of running and hiding...
After years of fighting...
One of the most influential people from the house of Saul
Is ready to commit their efforts to the LORD's will.

Abner is ready to help David become the king over all of Israel...
From Dan - the northernmost part of Israel...
To Beersheba - the southernmost part of Judah.

His goal from here on out is to unite the whole nation in peace...
With David on the throne.

So Abner sent messengers to David to give him the news.
David was glad to hear it...
But he'd need proof of Abner's commitment.

So David relayed his own message to Abner.
He said: *I'll make this agreement with you under one condition...
Don't come down here to meet with me without bringing my wife, Michal.*

You might remember Michal.
She was one of Saul's daughters.
And technically, David and Michal were still legally married.

This is important...
David married into Saul's family...
He's still Saul's son-in-law...
Which means, from a human perspective...
David has a legitimate claim to Saul's throne.

So David basically says to Abner...
*I like what I'm hearing...
But if what you're saying is true...
If you really want to help put me on the throne...
Then I'll need you to back up your words.
Bring me Michal... then we'll talk.*

So we see in verse 15...
That with the approval of king Ish-Bosheth...
Michal was taken to David.

But why would Ish-Bosheth approve?
He would've known what Michal's return meant.

I suspect it's because Ish-Bosheth was afraid of Abner.

When Abner declared to Ish-Bosheth that he would help David take the throne...
You'd think Ish-Bosheth would do something about it...
Maybe put him in prison or something...
But instead...

[SLIDE 11] 2 Samuel 3:11 - Ish-Bosheth did not dare to say another word to Abner, because he was afraid of him.

So Ish-Bosheth gave the order...
And Michal was taken to David.

But before Abner went to David...
He went to the elders of the Israelite tribes.
Look at verses 17-18...

[SLIDE 12] 2 Samuel 3:17-18 - Abner conferred with the elders of Israel and said, "For some time you have wanted to make David your king. Now do it! For the LORD promised David, 'By my servant David I will rescue my people Israel from the hand of the Philistines and from the hand of all their enemies.'"

Notice that the elders of Israel already wanted to make David their king...
They've wanted this for a while...
And Abner knew it!
But he continually worked against it...
Because his loyalty was with the house of Saul.

But not anymore.

He says to the elders:
You've wanted David as your king...
Now do it!
That's actually a command in Hebrew.
That speaks to the kind of authority that Abner had.

But there was one tribe that might have needed more than just his authority...
The Benjamites.

They were one of the tribes of Israel...

But more importantly...

They were *Saul's tribe*.

So why does the narrator go out of their way to tell us Abner went to them?

Well...

Maybe they needed a little more convincing?

Remember... Saul had been trying to kill David for years.

So why should the Benjamites agree to put David on the throne?

Well, we don't get a lot of detail.

All we know is that all the tribes of Israel agreed to give David the throne.

Once that was done...

Abner went to tell David the news in person...

[SLIDE 13] 2 Samuel 3:20-21 - When Abner, who had twenty men with him, came to David at Hebron, David prepared a feast for him and his men. Then Abner said to David, "Let me go at once and assemble all Israel for my lord the king, so that they may make a covenant with you, and that you may rule over all that your heart desires." So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace.

Notice that David sent Abner away in **peace**.

The writer of 2 Samuel actually repeats this fact three times in verses 21-23.

He's emphasizing the peaceful transition of David taking the throne.

And so at this point in the story...

We should feel like: *This is working!*

The fighting among the Israelites might finally be over!

God's promise is coming together peacefully!

But then Joab returns.

Joab was David's military commander.
He fought against Abner for years.
And if you remember...
Abner was the one who killed Joab's brother during the battle in chapter 2.

And so when Joab hears the agreement David just made with Abner...
He's not happy.

He sent messengers after Abner...
They brought him back...
David didn't know anything about this...
But when Abner came back...

[SLIDE 14] 2 Samuel 3:27 - ...Joab took him aside into an inner chamber, as if to speak with him privately. And there, to avenge the blood of his brother Asahel, Joab stabbed him in the stomach, and he died.

You know...
We might think Abner got what he deserved.
But Abner's actions were very different from Joab's.

When Abner killed Joab's brother...
That was in the middle of battle...
And it was after Abner warned his brother to stop...
And ultimately, it was in self-defense.

But now we're in a time of peace.
David just sent Abner away in peace.

And yet, Joab decided to ignore the peace David made with Abner.
Instead, he lured Abner back to Hebron...
He pulled him aside...
And he murdered him.

I hope you feel the tragedy.

Abner *finally* surrenders his will and becomes an instrument of peace...
But then Joab refuses to surrender his desire for revenge.

This makes me think of Abner's words...

Must the sword devour forever? (2 Sam 2:26)

For a brief moment...

It looked like the answer might be "no."

We don't need the sword.

Remember David's words to Goliath?

*"It is not by the sword or spear that the LORD saves;
For the battle is the LORD's." (1 Sam 17:47)*

We don't need the sword...

Because we have the LORD.

But in that moment of peace...

Joab brings the sword back.

Suddenly Abner's words in the previous chapter come full circle.

Remember his warning about the sword?

He said to Joab...

Don't you realize that this will end in bitterness? (2 Sam 2:26)

That was almost prophetic.

Because in chapter 3...

God's will was being fulfilled through peace.

But Joab couldn't see it.

He was blinded by his own bitterness.

And so today's passage shows us two people...

Both of them belonged to the LORD...

But both were faced with a choice for **how to follow** the LORD.

Abner's loyalty to Saul kept him from aligning his actions
with what the LORD promised to David.

But after years of war, death and bitterness...
Abner finally surrendered and aligned himself with the LORD's will.

But when Joab's desires didn't line up with God's desires...
He couldn't let it go.
Revenge had his heart.

So what about us?

**Because whatever has our heart...
Has us.**

We should ask ourselves...

[SLIDE 15] Am I actually aligned with what God's already doing? And if not, am I willing to surrender whatever's keeping me from aligning my will with His?

Here's the thing...

We can love Jesus...
We can believe His Word...
We can genuinely want people to know Him...
We can even *want* God's will to be done...

And yet at the same time...
We can still have things in our heart that hold us back from aligning with His will.

This is why Jesus said:
Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. (Mat 6:33)

[SLIDE 16] Seeking God's Kingdom means surrendering whatever competes for my heart so I can follow the King's lead.

So what competes for our heart?

**It's something that gets enough of my heart...
That it starts to determine my actions more than trusting the LORD does.**

Throughout the books of Samuel we've seen things like:
Fear... Greed... Bitterness... Revenge... Comfort... Misplaced loyalty...

All of these things can take our hearts captive in such a way that we feel like we don't have the capacity to follow Jesus in the way He calls us.

[SLIDE 17] Because what captures our heart is what shapes our perception of reality.

Fear says: *I can't do this.*

Bitterness says: *I can't forgive them.*

Revenge says: *I can't let this go.*

Greed says: *I can't afford to be generous.*

Comfort says: *I can't live without this.*

Misplaced Loyalty says: *I can't let them down.*

Again... Chris's words were so good...

Whatever has our heart, has us.

So what's the key?

How do we realign ourselves with Jesus?

It starts with prayer...

And it continues with trust...

And sometimes that means trusting Him enough to surrender whatever's been holding us back from following His lead.

Amen?

I've written a prayer for us this morning...

You'll see it on your sermon notes.

I wanted to give us something to come back to throughout the week.

I know this is a little different from our normal...

But I'd like us to pray this together as a Church family...

And so I invite you to pray with me...

Either silently or out loud...

Let's Pray

Father, may Your Kingdom come here and now...

May Your will be done in and through me...

Please shape my desires around Yours...

Help me recognize what You're doing...

Help me to surrender whatever's keeping me from participating with You...

Don't let things like fear, bitterness and greed take control of my heart...

You are my King... my God... and my Savior...

May Your will shape my own...

And determine how I live...

Today... tomorrow... and the rest of my days.

We pray, in the matchless Name of Jesus...

Amen.