

Title: What a Mess!  
Text: 2 Samuel 3.22-39  
Series: 2 Samuel  
Theme: Confusing, unresolved grief  
Prop Stmt: Somethings will never be resolved until glory because they can only be resolved by Christ.

Read Text:

I did a wedding once where the mother of the groom had done about everything that she could to sabotage it. Her son was a good man and he was marrying a wonderful girl. But the mom was a jealous, manipulative and downright evil person. So, at the wedding, there is terrible tension. The mother is smiling, but uncooperative. She feigned ignorance about what she was to do, while she mumbled under her breath. It was awful. I was trying to manage everyone, but honestly, I should have told her to go out to her car and not come back unless she was going to repent of her self-centeredness and cooperate.

You have been in those kinds of situations. Weddings and funerals are classic examples of really messy ones because the public nature of the event brings with it, expected protocols. But, what happens, when what you really believe does not match with how you are expected to behave? The tension comes from pretending. You pretend to be happy when you are bitter. You pretend to be mourning when you are not sad at all. But it is all confusing. It is not how life is supposed to be. And that is the case here.

David is the king of the southern section of Israel and is growing in influence and strength. Ish-bosheth is the king of the northern section and is getting weaker. Ish-bosheth's army commander, Abner, sees the hand writing on the wall, and decides to throw Ish-bosheth under the bus. Because Abner controls the army, he controls the country. Abner confers with the elders of Israel and they agree. Then Abner meets with the leaders of the tribe of Benjamin. This is a special meeting since Saul and Ish-bosheth are from Benjamin and have enjoyed the prominence that comes from having the king come from your tribe. Abner gets them on board. But, of course one of the big issues is: Can we trust David? David was on our side at one time, then he switched sides and now he has been fighting against us, how do we know that he won't be vengeful? Abner is able to convince them that this will work. After working to get those agreements, and after being part of the arrangement of bringing Michal to David, Abner has a sit-down with David and it does well. David and Abner have an agreement. Abner leaves in peace. There is an understanding. There is a plan. While there is reason for both sides to be wary, at this point, it looks as if, for the first time in a very long time, Israel is going to enjoy some internal peace. Then, the whole thing blows up!

1. **Unified leadership is rare.** (22-39)

This is a disaster waiting to happen because the key players did not know what the others were doing. But this situation is much deeper than a communication problem. The principal players

do not communicate with each other because they do not trust each other. David does not trust Joab, but he “needs” Joab. They appear to be unified, but really aren’t at the deepest level. Joab does not trust David but he “needs” David. They each use the other for their own purposes. It is a relationship that is bound to unravel given the right circumstance.

a. **Joab did not know what David was doing** (and did not trust him) (22-25)

Joab was gone on a raid when David’s meeting with Abner took place. I don’t know this to be the case, but it is very likely that David sent Joab on this raid knowing that Abner was coming and David did not tell Joab about it. The narrator says, “just then” (22a). This is tense. The guy who killed Joab’s brother was just here and just left and just then Joab appears. At the very least Joab did not know that Abner was coming. What is easy to overlook is the fact that Joab and the soldiers come back with a lot of spoil. But the usual celebration is short-lived. Joab, commander of the army, is not informed that the commander of the other army of his primary adversary just had a sit-down confab with his boss. Joab was not consulted, not informed and perhaps was sent on a mission so his boss could cover something up from him. If so, it wouldn’t be the last time David did that. When Joab heard that Abner had been there (and it wasn’t from David) he is lit up! Joab says that David is being played. He does not trust Abner nor David’s instincts on this. That may be true. What is true is that Joab is so full of revenge that he can’t see straight.

b. **David did not know what Joab was doing** (and did not trust him) (26)

Joab was in the dark because David did not inform him. Now, it is David’s turn to be in the dark. When Joab finds out that Abner had left in peace, Joab, just like Abner, takes matters into his own hands and operates apart from the authority of his king. So, now David is in the dark. Joab represents the king. Whatever Joab does, reflects on the king. Joab sends for Abner. Now, this is plausible. Who knows what reason was given to Abner for Joab’s absence, but if there is going to be a unification of the two entities, there has to be an agreement on how to bring the armies together. We simply do not know if any promises were made by David to Abner. But Joab sent messengers to convince Abner to come back and David (v.26) did not know it. Did the messengers deliver the message in the name of Joab or David? We don’t know. They were probably told by Joab to do so in the name of David. Otherwise, Abner may have been more suspicious than what he apparently was. Once again, there is irony. Joab accused Abner of being deceitful, yet it is Joab who is deceitful. Joab acted all concerned for David and the kingdom, but what Joab was about to do would be a terrible blow to David and the kingdom. Joab did not care.

c. **Abner did not know what Joab was doing** (and did trust him) (26-27)

Because Joab represented the king and the king made a covenant with Abner and was at peace with him, Abner had every reason to trust the king and the king’s representatives. So, Abner returns and does not seem to suspect anything. The narrator points out that Joab struck Abner,

just like Abner killed Asahel. *“in the stomach”* He also makes it clear that it was a revenge killing.

David did not know what Joab did, but he found out. He then tried to put distance between himself and Joab. “I and my kingdom are forever guiltless before the LORD of the blood of Abner”... He then prays a curse on Joab and his family (which is part of David’s family). The narrator repeats in v.30 that Joab did this for revenge. What a mess! David does not trust Joab. Joab does not trust David. Joab just murdered a man that David made a covenant with. David just publicly cursed Joab, but did not execute him like he executed the man who claimed to have killed Saul, or like he will to the guys who assassinate Ish-bosheth. In fact, David doesn’t even fire him.

If you are skeptical of political leaders and believe that behind every action and speech is a sinister motive, then you have plenty of ammunition here. David now orders Joab and all the people with him (soldiers?) to tear their clothes, mourn and walk ahead of the bier that carries the body of the man that Joab just killed. David followed behind in what amounted to a state funeral that had David leading the people in weeping, lamenting and mourning. By this, David was making it clear that Abner’s death was not his decision. He was grieved by this. It seems that eventually, the people came to that conclusion. (v.37) David’s people in Judah probably came to that conclusion sooner than the northern kingdom when word got back to them. But in the moment would that not be bizarre for Joab to publicly mourn with his clothes torn over the death of the man that he murdered and obviously planned for? What are people supposed to think? The heart of the leadership is at odds with one another. The scene ends (v.39) with David telling his servants about how terrible Joab and Abishai are. Again, he is making it clear that what they did was awful and does not represent the kind of leadership that he wants to be associated with. The problem is, he is associated with it.

Beloved, unified leadership is rare. That is why unified leadership is such a sweet treasure and a gift that has to be pursued and defended. The basis of unity is truth, love and humility. This is why countries and empires do not last, companies break up, sadly, even families and churches. We tend to assume that everyone is in it for themselves, because that is the case so much of the time. Even though unified leadership is rare, we long for it and thrive when we have it. Happy are the kids whose mom and dad are on the same gospel page. Happy is the church whose leaders know the truth, defend the truth, love the truth, love the flock and do not care about who gets credit. Can you imagine how happy we will be when we are living under the reign of Christ in his fully realized kingdom? “Your kingdom come; your will be done.”

## 2. **Every leader has flaws.**

### a. **Joab is strong, but not kind**

His mantra is: “not your will but mine be done” Joab did not confess to be motivated by revenge, but the text clearly states twice that he was. Now, is it possible that Joab tried to defend his actions based on the OT law of the avenger? If someone murdered someone in your

family you can avenge their death, unless they run to a city of refuge, where the rulers will hold court. It doesn't quite fit. Asahel died in a battle. Plus, Hebron was a city of refuge. We don't know if Joab tried to argue this, but it really didn't apply to his situation.

Was Joab motivated by jealousy and power? I think we have to say, maybe. We see Joab in Abner. Joab is an opportunist who takes advantage of situations and seeks to remove threats. Joab will go on to kill Absalom against the explicit instructions of David. It all comes to a head years later when Joab puts his reputation on the line by scheming to make Adonijah king and even participating in his unlawful coronation in the waning days of David's life. He did exactly what Abner did. It is ironic how much distrust and even hatred we can have of people who look so much like we do. The things that made me the angriest as a parent was when my kids were acting like me. I think that we all need to take this heart. Think about the things that make you the most upset. Are you really upset by them or are you upset because they reveal your own heart? I claim to hate hypocrisy. Maybe I do. Maybe I want to deflect attention from me. I claim to hate prideful speech. Maybe I do. Maybe I'm able to discern it because I'm so familiar with it.

We are complex beings and do not even know our own hearts. Joab is an example of this. There are times when he is clearly motivated by genuine concern for David and tries to talk David out of doing something wrong as we will see in chapter 24. But Joab is also an opportunist. And at the end of the day, there is clearly a fracture in the leadership.

#### **b. David is kind, but not always strong.**

One of David's weaknesses and even failures is his unwillingness to confront situations decisively. I think that one of the factors that contributes to this is David's awareness of his own sin. When you read the Psalms that David wrote, he is very in touch with his emotions, very passionate, and very vulnerable. However, he is still a dad who needs to discipline his boys, which he doesn't do. He is still the king who needs to deal with Joab, which he does, I would argue in a passive aggressive manner. He is also the CEO of the kingdom. There are things that have to be worked out. Think about this. Joab and Abner had to be resolved. That was a problem. How is that going to happen and who else can make it happen? Then, Joab is disrespectful and insubordinate. He murders the very person his king swore to protect.

It is my opinion, that this action, cost the unification process 5 years. Ish-bosheth reigned for 2 years (spoiler alert) before he was murdered. But it was 7 years from the time David was anointed king of Judah and Ish-bosheth was made king in the north before the two parts were united under David. It is pretty obvious to me that Joab's murder of Abner not only set back the unification but threatened it. Why does David tolerate this guy? David is kind. He really is. His kindness is what endears us to him. His kindness is what endears his people to him. In verses 31-36, we see the phrase "all the people" 5 times. This is by design. The people are watching David. They are getting their clues from him. Did Joab do this on his own? Was this a hit ordered by David? What are we supposed to think about this? While David shows some weakness in how he deals with Joab, his grief is evident. He leads the people in mourning and the people are so convinced of David's grief that they end up being concerned about him and

want him to eat. David refuses to eat. David mourns this loss. He may have had some history of fighting with Abner and may have had some other reasons to respect him, but at the very least, David is a kind soul and feels the injustice of Abner's murder deeply. I believe that his kindness is why he is called a man after God's own heart.

Every leader, except Jesus has flaws, so do you. If you are a strong type who is a short on kindness, let others help you grow in this. It will help you look like Jesus. If you are the kind type who doesn't like to confront problems in a timely way, let others help you grow in this so that people around you don't have to be confused. This is a good conversation for every member of the family to have and for good friends to have with each other. In order to help you with that, there is a QR code on the sermon note page in the bulletin for you to find. This will link you to a series of questions for your lunch today.

The very thing that was a problem between Abner and Ish-bosheth is the problem between Joab and David. Because unified leadership is rare and because every leader has flaws, we get caught in the middle and are not sure what to believe. Now, the rupture between the north and the south is probably deeper. The man who convinced the elders in the north and the tribe of Benjamin to go all in is dead. There is no unity. There is no peace. There is no trust.

We are familiar with the term "buyer's remorse" and we apply that to some of the officials that we elect into office, new management at work, new software programs, new spouse, new pastor, etc. No matter who, we tend to get tired of them because time reveals the flaws in everyone. So, we change jobs, presidents, or churches, because we think we found something better. Sometimes it is better, but even the better ones still have flaws. However...

### **3. Life under Christ is certain and eternal joy.**

Overall, David was a good king. He would not qualify to be an elder, but he was a good king, but he had issues. I do not want you to be like nor trust in David. I want you to trust in Christ because his kingship and kingdom will never let you down. Let's do a quick compare from the issues that we've looked at in our text. The leadership of the Father, Son and Spirit is perfectly united and eternally so. Our king will never be surprised at what we or anyone else does. He knows it all. And we will never be embarrassed by something he says or does. He will never be caught in a discrepancy or lie. Eternity will only add more and more evidence to why our trust, adoration and worship of him is right and right to grow. Christ will never grow tired of his role and slack off in protecting us. The fact is, evil will be permanently banned from his kingdom. How can he do that? Because evil is dealt with on the cross for the believer and in hell for those who reject him. There will never be anything bad, wrong, dangerous, threatening, broken, guilty, shameful, depressing, repulsive or just plain sad with Christ. There will never be loss, anger, bitterness, discouragement, depression, sickness or separation. There will be everything that fills every need, every good desire, every good thought, every good hope. Our hope is not in this world, nor in her kingdoms. Our hope is in Christ. Jesus is strong and Jesus is kind. His omnipotence enables him to do anything he determines to do and his kindness guarantees that he will only use his omnipotence for the eternal good and joy of those he loves.