

"Who Is Your King?"

2 Samuel 2:1–4:12

INTRODUCTION

We spend our lives trying to answer what we think are the most important questions.

- Who should I marry?
- Where should I live?
- What career should I pursue?
- Should I take this job or that one?
- How do I raise my kids right?
- How do I get out of this debt?
- How do I fix this relationship?

These are not trivial questions. They are real.

People lie awake at night over them. We seek counsel from friends, from pastors, from therapists. We make painful decisions. We change course. We start over.

All trying to answer the questions they believe will determine how their lives turn out.

But what if the most important question is one that most of us never think to ask?

You could answer every one of those questions perfectly —

- find the right spouse,
- land the right career,
- raise your kids well,
- manage your money wisely —

and still get your life catastrophically wrong.

Because the great and decisive question of life is

- not what you achieve,
- nor how good you become,
- and certainly not how much you acquire.

It will do you no good at all to be highly successful, seriously virtuous, and even ridiculously wealthy if you have gotten the most important question wrong. So, what is this question?

What is the most important question in life?

I am referring to the question: Who is your king?

- Not who is your boss.
- Not who is your spouse.
- Not who is your hero or your role model or your favorite candidate.

Who is your *king* — the one who has final authority over your life, whose word overrides yours, whose agenda displaces yours?

Now let me be precise about what I'm asking.

The question is not "Who is the king?" That is a question of information. It has a right answer, and you can know it without it changing anything about how you live.

As we'll see this morning, a man named Abner could answer that question with perfect theological accuracy — and spend years fighting against the king he correctly identified.

James tells us that "Even the demons believe — and shudder" (James 2:19). They have the information. They have no allegiance.

The question is "Who is *your* king?"

That is a question of allegiance. It asks

- not what you know but who you belong to.
 - Not who you can identify but whose authority you are actually living under —
 - not on Sunday morning but one day this week.
-

And here is what makes this question so serious: your answer doesn't change who the king is.

As we will see in 2 Samuel, David was God's anointed king — whether anyone acknowledged it or not.

- Generals could install rival kings.
- Commanders could scheme behind David's back.
- Assassins could try to earn his favor through violence.

None of it changed who sat on the throne.

And while men resisted, manipulated, and presumed, David grew stronger and stronger — because the kingdom was God's kingdom, and God was building it with or without their cooperation.

The same is true today.

Jesus is Lord. That is not something for which we get to vote. It is a reality for you to reckon with.

Your answer to the question "**Who is your king?**" does not determine who sits on the throne. It determines whether you are living in step with reality — or at war with it.

That question drives the story we are about to look at in 2 Samuel 2–4.

Saul is dead. For years, God's people had lived under Saul's reign. Now the king who was "asked for" by the people is gone. And the question that has been simmering beneath the surface of Israel's life finally boils over into the open:

Who will be their king?

There is a man in the south — his name is David. Years ago, when he was still a boy, the prophet Samuel poured oil over his head in Bethlehem. God had chosen him.

But David has never worn a crown. He has spent years running, hiding, fighting — and waiting.

Now Saul is dead, and the moment has arrived.

But watch what David does.

His first act is not to seize power. It is not to march north and claim what is rightfully his.

His first act is to ask God.

[READ] "After this David inquired of the LORD, 'Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?' And the LORD said to him, 'Go up.' David said, 'To which shall I go up?' And he said, 'To Hebron.'" (2 Samuel 2:1)

David inquired of the Lord. His path to the kingship began not with initiative but with receptivity. Not with grasping but with asking.

He sought God's direction, likely in the same way he had before:

- through God's word,
- through God's appointed servant,
- within the community of God's people.

And then he obeyed.

The Lord sends him to Hebron — and that is no accident.

Hebron was the city of Abraham. It was

- where God first appeared to Abraham,
- where Sarah was buried,
- where the only portion of the promised land Abraham ever possessed was located.

David's going up to Hebron connects his story to the oldest promises God ever made — the promise to bring blessing to all the families of the earth through Abraham's offspring.

David's story is the continuation of Abraham's story. And both of them point forward to Jesus,

Who will be introduced in the first sentence of the New Testament as "the son of David" and "the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1).

What begins in Hebron will pass through a stable in Bethlehem, up to Nazareth, down the streets of Jerusalem and will end up on a throne in heaven.

So David goes up to Hebron. And the men of Judah meet him at Hebron and anoint him king.

Sure it's a small beginning — just one tribe, tucked away in the southern hills. But it is the kingdom of God, concrete and visible, like a mustard seed.

And then notice, immediately, an intense rival appears.

[READ] "But Abner the son of Ner, commander of Saul's army, took Ish-bosheth the son of Saul and brought him over to Mahanaim, and he made him king." (2 Samuel 2:8–9a)

Oh boy. We have a mess. Abner does this without consulting God, without seeking any word from the Lord. It is a purely human power play.

So, now there are two kings in Israel. Two claims on the people's allegiance. David in the south, and Ish-bosheth in the north.

And over the next several years, a series of characters will each respond to that situation in their own way. And as they respond, every one of them will reveal something about the human heart — about how people actually relate to God's chosen king when the pressure is on.

As we walk through these chapters, I want to set another story alongside them.



We are going to move between three moments in time. Take a look at this graphic:

- a king in the hills of Judah, a thousand years before Christ;
- a fisherman on the roads of Galilee, walking with Jesus in the first century;
- and Us — in this room, today.

What we will see is that the same patterns of allegiance and resistance that show up in David's court show up on the road with Jesus a thousand years later.

These are not ancient problems, reserved for days gone by. They are human problems. And they are ours.

Peter walked with Jesus in the flesh — heard his voice, saw his face — and still embodied every one of the failures we are about to diagnose.

If Peter was not immune, neither are we. [remove graphic]

So the question stands — the most important question in life is:

Who is your king?

And to help us answer that honestly today, let me sharpen it:

How do you know if Jesus is actually your king?

I want to walk us through four signs — four ways to test whether Jesus truly reigns in your life as your king.

Think of it as approaching a house. The first sign is at the front door — the most visible, the most straightforward. Each sign after that takes us deeper inside, where the failures become more subtle, more hidden, and harder to detect.

Let's start on the front porch at the front door.

SIGN NUMBER 1

You know Jesus is your king when you receive him willingly — without conditions and without delay.

Notice with me what happened in Hebron.

David goes up. He has inquired of the Lord, he has obeyed, and now he arrives. Notice what the men of Judah do.

[READ] "And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah." (2 Samuel 2:4a)

- No deliberation.
- No negotiation.
- No conditions attached.

The brevity of the account is striking — these men had no hesitation. They came and they anointed him.

Perhaps they had been waiting for this day. Perhaps they had known since Samuel's anointing in Bethlehem that this was coming.

Whatever their reasoning, what they did was simple: God had chosen David, and Judah received him.

It was a small beginning. One tribe, in the hill country, while the Philistines occupied the north.

But watch what the narrator does. He keeps coming back to this moment.

- In verse 4: "the men of Judah came and there they anointed David."
- In verse 7: "the house of Judah has anointed me king over them."
- And then verse 10:

[READ] "Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and he reigned two years. But the house of Judah followed David." (2 Samuel 2:10b)

Again and again — the narrator keeps returning to the fact that there were some who did receive him.

Why does the narrator keep repeating this?

Because over the next three chapters, we are going to see

- resistance,
- scheming,
- vengeance,
- and murder.

We are going to see powerful men fight against David, manipulate David, and presume upon David.

And in the middle of all of that chaos, the narrator wants us to know: there were some who received him. Simply. Willingly. Gladly.

That is the first sign of genuine allegiance. You receive the King willingly — without conditions and without delay.

Fast forward a thousand years later, another King came to his own people —

- and his own people did not receive him (John 1:11).
 - They did not want this man to reign over them (Luke 19:14).
 - But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12).
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One of those moments was on a road near Caesarea Philippi, when **Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?"**

And Peter answered without hesitation: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16).

- No calculation.
- No negotiation.
- No conditions.

Peter saw the King and said so — willingly and gladly.

Peter received the King. Not a tribe responding to a political situation, but one man recognizing his Lord and declaring it openly.

What does willing reception look like for you — today, right now?

Have you received Jesus — as King, as the one with authority over your life — willingly and gladly?

- Not because your parents brought you to church.
- Not because your spouse expected it.
- Not because Christianity is culturally comfortable where you live.
- Not because Jesus is convenient for your situation.

But because you have recognized what God has done and you want to be part of it — the way Judah wanted to be part of what God was doing in Hebron?

Have you received Jesus?

- Not "Did you grow up in church?"
- Not "Did you pray a prayer once?"

But have you received him — as your King — willingly and gladly, the way Judah received David, the way Peter confessed the Christ?

The first sign that Jesus is your king: you have received him willingly.

That is the front door. That is the most visible sign of allegiance.

But as we explore the signs of whether Jesus is truly our king, we need to step inside the house — because the next sign is harder to see, and it can hide behind the very knowledge that makes you look like a believer.

SIGN NUMBER 2

Back in Hebron, notice the contrast with what has happened.

- David inquired of the Lord. Abner consulted no one.
 - David received the kingdom through obedience. Abner manufactured a kingdom through raw political power.
 - David was anointed by the people. Ish-bosheth was installed by a general.
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In fifteenth-century England, they had a name for men like Abner.



The Earl of Warwick – "The Kingmaker."

He was the most powerful nobleman in the land – wealthier than the king, commanding more troops, controlling more territory. He installed Edward IV on the throne because he believed he could manage him. And when Edward started making independent decisions, Warwick turned against him and tried to install a different king he could control.

The man behind the throne. The man who sees the kingdom as his project to manage.

That is Abner. He is the Kingmaker – the one who installs kings he can control because the real king threatens his power.

And so begins a long, grinding civil war.

For years – years – Abner props up this rival kingdom. Battle after battle. Casualty after casualty.

You would think Abner simply doesn't know that David is God's chosen king. You would think he is fighting out of ignorance – that if someone would just tell him what God had promised, he would lay down his arms.

But then, in chapter 3, comes the reveal.

Abner has a falling out with Ish-bosheth – a personal offense, a blow to his pride. And in his fury, Abner lets slip what he has known all along.

Listen to what he says to King Ish-bosheth:

[READ] "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." (2 Samuel 3:8b-10)

Wait. Did you hear that? He said "if I do not accomplish for David what the LORD has sworn to him.

Abner *knew*.

He knew what God had sworn to David. He could articulate it with remarkable theological precision —

- transfer the kingdom,
- set up the throne,
- from Dan to Beersheba.

He could preach the gospel of David's kingship.

And yet, he had spent *years* fighting against it.

Why?

He did not want it to be true. He did not want to accept it as true.

Because accepting it would have cost him too much, it would have cost him everything — his position, his power, his identity. He had a vision of how the kingdom should work — a vision with himself at the center — and God's actual plan didn't match it.

So he had convinced himself, against reason, against God's plan, against everything he knew to be true, that there was a future for the house of Saul.

And notice what follows his outburst:

[READ] "And Ish-bosheth could not answer Abner another word, because he feared him." (2 Samuel 3:11)

Even the puppet king that Abner had installed knew who really held the power. Abner was the man who made things happen. That was his identity. And God's promise to David threatened everything Abner had built.

Abner knew the truth about David's kingship and did not want it to be true.

That is the second diagnostic sign for us.

You may not have Jesus as your king if you know the truth about him but don't want it to be true.

- When your problem is not ignorance — but informed resistance.
 - Not a lack of knowledge — but a refusal to let the knowledge you already have change anything about how you live.
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Today, in this room — how many of us have heard that Jesus is Lord but simply do not want it to be true?

What does this look like for us today in the twenty-first century?

- It looks like having a Bible on your shelf and not opening it — not because you don't believe it matters, but because you sense that if you read it honestly, it will make demands you're not ready to meet.
 - It looks like hearing a sermon that unsettles you and immediately finding reasons to dismiss it rather than sitting with the discomfort.
 - It looks like being able to articulate what Christianity teaches while keeping it safely distant from the actual decisions you make about your life, your priorities, your money, your relationships, your ambitions.
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Now — you might hear Abner's story and think, "That's an Old Testament problem. Abner was working from a distance — a promise he'd heard, a God he couldn't see.

If he had been standing right in front of God's King, if he had been closer to the situation, he would have accepted the truth."

Fast forward a thousand years after Abner, at Caesarea Philippi, where Peter proves that wrong.

Moments after his great confession — moments after correctly identifying Jesus as the Christ — Peter hears Jesus describe what that kingship will actually look like, what it will actually cost:

- suffering,
- rejection,
- death.

And Peter's response is immediate: "And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you" (Matthew 16:22).

Why did Peter say this?

Because a suffering, dying King was not the King Peter had signed up for.

The disciples were expecting a conqueror — a king who would restore the kingdom to Israel, defeat the enemies, establish thrones. Peter had left everything to follow this King. He had a vision of what the kingdom would look like — and his place in it.

And Jesus was describing a kingdom that demolished Peter's vision entirely.

A king who suffers and dies doesn't hand out thrones. He hands out crosses.

Peter didn't resist because he lacked information. He had just declared that Jesus was the Christ.

He resisted because the truth about the King's way — the way of suffering, the way of the cross — didn't match what he wanted the kingdom to be.

That is Abner's problem exactly. A man who knows who the King is but refuses to accept the King's way because it doesn't fit his vision of the kingdom.

Jesus' response to Peter was devastating: "Get behind me, Satan! You are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man" (Matthew 16:23).

Peter knew the truth about Jesus' kingship — he had just confessed it — and when Jesus described what that kingship would actually look like, Peter refused to accept it.

- Not because he was ignorant.
- Not because he was far from Jesus. He was standing right in front of him.

Proximity to the King did not protect Peter from this failure. And it would not protect us either.

You can sit in church every Sunday, read your Bible every morning, call yourself a Christian for thirty years — and still resist the King's way when it doesn't match your vision of how things should go. Let me ask you today:

Is there a part of Scripture's portrait of Jesus — his commands, his character, his claims on your life — that you are aware of but have quietly decided doesn't apply to you?

- Maybe it's a version of the kingdom that doesn't match your expectations.
- Maybe it's a path that looks like loss when you were counting on gain.
- Maybe it's a command that would cost you something you're not willing to give up.
- Maybe it's a version of Jesus that accepts everything because that's what love does.

Abner had a vision of the kingdom with himself at the center. Peter had a vision of the kingdom with thrones and conquest.

Both men knew who the King was. Neither wanted the King's actual kingdom.

The question is not whether you know who Jesus is. The question is whether you are willing to accept his kingdom on his terms — even when it looks nothing like what you expected.

Well, we have stepped inside the house now, past the front door of reception, and found something troubling — knowledge without obedience, knowing the truth about Jesus but not wanting it to be true.

But as we continue exploring the signs of whether Jesus is truly our king, we need to go deeper still. Because Abner's story doesn't end with resistance. He eventually comes to David.

And what happens next takes us down to the foundation — because you can enter the house and still discover that the ground beneath your feet was never solid.

SIGN NUMBER 3

Back in Hebron, would you believe it, Abner switches sides. And at first glance, it looks like everything has changed.

[READ] "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 Samuel 3:12)

He is coming to his senses. He is coming to the right king. He is bringing Israel with him.

He even goes to the elders of Israel and preaches with astonishing theological accuracy:

[READ] "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."" (2 Samuel 3:17b–18)

His words are extraordinary.

- He calls David the Lord's "servant."
- He calls Israel the Lord's "people."
- He cites the Lord's own promise.

It is remarkable that this designation of David as the Lord's "servant," which will become one of David's most important titles, is first recorded on the lips of Abner — the man who had set up a king to rival David.

He is coming to the right king. But we need to take a deeper look, to look underneath the words. What drove this change?

What we need to see here is that this change was not driven by true repentance. Not by a reckoning with God.

Ish-bosheth had accused Abner of disloyalty, and Abner's pride was wounded. And God's plan to anoint David that he had resisted for years suddenly became convenient — because now it served his purposes.

If we look closely here, we see that Abner comes to David still seeing himself as the man who makes things happen — swearing that *he* will "accomplish" what God has sworn, that *he* will "set up the throne of David."

And maybe most importantly, notice what we don't hear from Abner.

- "I was wrong to make Ish-bosheth king."
- "I have acted as though Israel were my people."
- "I have spent years defying what I knew to be true."

We never hear those words from Abner.

- In other words, we never hear one word of confession.
- Not one acknowledgment of failure.

- Not one moment of reckoning with the years he had spent at war with the king he now claims to serve.

Abner came to the right king, yes. But he came without repentance, without confession, without ever saying "I was wrong."



If you have ever seen the movie *Casablanca*, you know Captain Renault — the French police captain who cooperates with the Vichy regime and the Nazis, not because he believes in their cause, but because it is convenient.

He is charming, pragmatic, and completely without conviction.

And at the end of the film, when the wind shifts — when it becomes clear which side will prevail — Renault switches. He drops the bottle of Vichy water in the trash and walks off with Rick into the fog.

It is one of cinema's great moments. But notice: Renault never confesses. He never says, "I was wrong to collaborate with the Nazis. I was wrong to look the other way while people were arrested."

He simply joins the winning side with his charm intact. He is useful, he is likable, and he is utterly unrepentant.

The audience loves him — but he is Abner. He switches sides without ever reckoning with the side he was against.

Abner came to God's king without repentance.

This is the third diagnostic sign.

You may not have Jesus as your king if you come to him without repentance.

Coming to the king is not the same as surrendering to the king. You can enter the house and discover the foundation was never poured – because

- you never repented,
 - you never confessed,
 - you changed sides without ever reckoning with why you were on the wrong side in the first place.
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What about us – today, in the twenty-first century?

There is a kind of "coming to Jesus" that skips repentance entirely.

You have tried to run your life on your own terms and it has stopped working – a marriage is failing, a career has collapsed, a crisis has stripped away your illusions – and so you "come to Jesus."

But you come because circumstances forced your hand, not because you have genuinely reckoned with who you are in the presence of the King. You come with a deal to offer – "I'll give you Sundays, I'll clean up my life, I'll be a better person" – rather than with a confession to make.

The gospel does not say "come to Jesus with a deal." The gospel says "repent and believe" (Mark 1:15).

Repentance means saying what Abner never said: "I was wrong. I have been living as though I were the king of my own life. I am not."

Now you might hear Abner's story and think, "That's a problem of insincerity. Abner was a political operator. I came to Jesus with genuine feeling."

But a thousand years after David, on the night before the cross, in the upper room in Jerusalem, Peter shows us that you can be completely sincere and still fail to repent.

Jesus told Peter directly what was coming: "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times" (John 13:38).

Jesus was giving Peter an explicit word about Peter's weakness.

And this was Peter's chance.

- He could have said, "Lord, I believe you. I know I am weak. Have mercy on me."
- He could have confessed: "I am capable of exactly what you are describing."

That would have been repentance — an honest reckoning with who he really was in the presence of the King.

Instead Peter said the opposite:

- "Even though they all fall away, I will not" (Mark 14:29).
- "I will lay down my life for you" (John 13:37).

Peter could not confess his weakness. Jesus told him he would fail, and Peter insisted he was stronger than that.

He offered heroic pledges instead of honest vulnerability. He substituted self-confidence for surrender.

Peter could not confess his weakness. He came to Jesus with total sincerity — but without the honest reckoning that repentance requires.

This is not exactly the same as Abner's cold calculation. Peter genuinely meant every word.

But sincerity is not repentance.

You can be deeply sincere and still refuse to say the one thing that needs to be said: "I am not as strong as I think I am. I need the King more than I know."

Here is the diagnostic question for us: Have you ever genuinely repented?

- Not just felt sorry.
- Not just changed strategies.
- Not just shown up at church when life got hard.

But have you actually confessed — specifically, honestly, without spin?

Have you said the words Abner never said:

"I was wrong. I spent years living as though I were in charge. I was on the wrong side and I knew it"?

And have you said the words Peter could not say:

"I am weak. I am capable of failing. I am not as strong or as faithful as I think I am, and I need the King's mercy more than I need my own heroic effort"?

Repentance is not just confessing past sin. It is also confessing present weakness.

- Abner wouldn't acknowledge what he had done.
- Peter wouldn't acknowledge what he was capable of doing.

Both stood in the presence of the king without the one thing the king's presence demands: honesty about who you really are.

If your coming to Jesus has never included that kind of honest reckoning — if the foundation of your faith is a deal you offered rather than a confession you made — you may be in the house, but the foundation was never poured.

We are now below the surface of the house — down at the foundation.

We have moved

- past the front door of reception,
- past the room of knowledge without obedience,
- and discovered that you can be inside the house and still be standing on sand

because you never repented, never confessed, never honestly reckoned with who you are in the presence of the King.

But as we explore these signs of whether Jesus is truly our king, there is one more room – the deepest, the most hidden, the most dangerous.

It is not about how you came in. It is about how you are living right now – this week, today.

It is the room where people who are actively serving the King discover that they have been overriding his word every day.

SIGN NUMBER 4

Back in Hebron, David has just accomplished something remarkable.

After years of civil war, he has made peace with Abner. When the two military commanders had tried to resolve the conflict on their own, the result had been war (2 Samuel 3:1). Only when David personally became involved was the result peace.

Abner left Hebron. The division in Israel was on the verge of healing.

And then Joab comes back.

Joab – David's nephew, his military commander, the fiercest warrior in the kingdom – had been away on a raid.

But to understand what happens next, you need to know something about Joab and Abner.

Earlier in the conflict, during a battle at the pool of Gibeon, Joab's younger brother Asahel had pursued Abner on the battlefield.

Asahel was fast — "swift of foot as a wild gazelle" (2 Samuel 2:18) — and he locked on to Abner and would not turn aside.

Abner warned him. Twice.

"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?" (2 Samuel 2:22).

Abner did not want to kill this young man.

But Asahel refused to stop. And Abner struck him, and Asahel died.

- It happened in battle.
- It was self-defense.
- Abner had done everything he could to avoid it.

But Joab's brother was dead.

And Joab had never forgotten.

Now Joab returns to Hebron and discovers that the man who killed his brother has been to see the king — and the king sent him away in peace.

Joab is furious.

He storms into David's presence:

[READ] "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 your going out and your coming in, and to know all that you are doing.'" (2 Samuel 3:24–25)

It sounds reasonable. It sounds like the counsel of a man who is concerned for the kingdom's security. It sounds like the most loyal man in the room speaking up.



If you have seen the movie *A Few Good Men*, you recognize this.

Colonel Jessup — the commanding officer who ordered an unauthorized disciplinary action that killed a marine — makes the same argument Joab is making here.

"You don't understand the threats I face. My methods are necessary. You can't handle the truth."

Jessup genuinely believes he is protecting his country. He is not corrupt. He is not self-serving in the way a typical villain is. He is a man who has looked at a real threat and concluded that

- the rules don't apply in his situation —
- that the people in authority don't understand what it takes.

That is Joab.

"You can't handle the truth" is what Joab says to David in verse 25. *I know better than the king. My methods are necessary. You were a fool to let Abner go.*

Then, without telling David what he intends to do, Joab sends messengers after Abner, lures him back to Hebron under false pretenses, and takes him aside privately in the gate.

And there — after peace had been won:

[READ] "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." (2 Samuel 3:26-27)

Now we see the truth.

Not security. Vengeance.

"For the blood of Asahel his brother."

Joab was not concerned about the kingdom at all. All of that talk about Abner being a spy — Joab was the one who deceived David, not Abner. His rebuke of the king was a cover for personal revenge.

And notice the devastating detail tucked inside that passage: "But David did not know about it."

Joab was able to carry out his deed only by keeping it secret from David.

But here is the truly unsettling part.

In his own mind, Joab believed he was fiercely loyal to David.

His ways, however, were not the king's ways.

Joab claimed allegiance to the king but consistently overrode the king's word with his own judgment.

This is the fourth diagnostic sign —

You may not have Jesus as your king if you claim allegiance but consistently override his word with your own judgment.

And this is the most dangerous, because it looks like faithfulness from the outside.

Joab was not a traitor. He was not plotting to overthrow David. He genuinely believed he was serving the kingdom.

But his loyalty was to a version of David that existed in his own head — a David who ought to want Abner dead, who ought to value decisive action over patience.

When the actual David didn't match the David in Joab's head, Joab didn't adjust. He acted behind the king's back. He edited the king to fit his own convictions.

David's response made the truth visible. David says:

[READ] "I and my kingdom are forever guiltless before the LORD for the blood of Abner the son of Ner... 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." (2 Samuel 3:28, 37)

Joab's ways were not this king's ways.

This point is not about how you came to Jesus. This is about how you are living right now — today, in the twenty-first century.

Point 3 asked about the foundation — whether you ever genuinely repented.

This point is different.

Joab is not a newcomer. He is not arriving at the threshold. He has been with David from the beginning. He is the most active, most energetic, most committed servant in the kingdom.

His problem is not at the point of entry. His problem is what happens

- on a specific day,
- in a specific situation,
- when the king makes a specific decision that Joab disagrees with.

David says peace. Joab's gut says war.

And in that moment — that real, concrete, Tuesday-afternoon moment — Joab follows his gut instead of the king's word.

Let us consider something: every person in this room — including me — knows Jesus only through mediated means. You know him

- through Scripture,
- through preaching,
- through the witness of the Spirit,
- through the community of believers.

You have never met him face to face.

Which means you are always at risk of doing what Joab did: editing the king to match your own instincts and then following the edited version with total sincerity.

The actual Jesus has spoken. His words are in Scripture. And his words regularly say things we would never come up with on our own.

- Jesus says love your enemies. Your instinct says protect yourself.
- Jesus says forgive seventy times seven. Your instinct says three strikes and you're done.
- Jesus says the last will be first. Your instinct says fight for the front of the line.
- Jesus says blessed are the meek. Your instinct says blessed are the strong.

When you read Scripture and find something that contradicts your deepest preferences — that is the actual King speaking. The version in your head would never say that.

Only the real King says things you don't want to hear.

Now we might hear Joab's story and think, "That's a problem of deliberate scheming. Joab planned this. He lured Abner back. He calculated the whole thing in advance. I would never do something that cold-blooded."

But a thousand years after David, in a garden called Gethsemane, on the night of Jesus' arrest, Peter shows us it doesn't require a calculated plan.

Remember where we left Peter. In the upper room he could not confess his weakness – he pledged to die instead.

Now they have left the upper room and crossed the Kidron Valley. Jesus is praying. Soldiers are coming.

And Peter draws his sword and cuts off the ear of the high priest's servant (John 18:10).

Peter is not scheming. This is not premeditated.

This is a split-second reaction – instinct overriding the King's word in a moment of crisis. Peter doesn't stop to think, "I know better than Jesus." He doesn't have time to think. His instincts fire – protect, defend, fight – and before he knows it, he is contradicting everything the King has said.

Jesus responds: "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that my Father has given me?" (John 18:11).

The King said "cup." Peter said "sword." The King chose the path of suffering. Peter chose the path of violence.

Peter overrode the King's word – not through a long-term scheme like Joab, but through a single instinctive moment when his reflexes moved faster than his submission.

You don't have to be a Joab to override the King. You don't need a plan or a secret meeting.

All it takes is one unguarded moment when you react out of

- fear,
- anger,
- pride,
- or self-protection

instead of out of the King's word.

- The hurtful thing you said before you thought about it.
- The decision you made in the heat of the moment.
- The instinct you followed because it felt right, without ever asking whether it was the King's way or yours.

Joab overrode the king deliberately. Peter overrode the king reflexively.

In both cases, the King's will was contradicted by someone who genuinely believed they were serving him.

The cause of Christ cannot be advanced by methods that contradict the character of Christ – whether those methods are planned or impulsive.

This is not about your conversion. This is about walking with Jesus last week.

When you read something in Scripture that contradicted what you wanted to do –

- forgive someone you wanted to punish,
- give something you wanted to keep,
- stay quiet when you wanted to fight –

what did you do? Did you obey? Or did you explain it away?

When the King's specific word collided with your specific instinct in a real moment with real consequences — whose voice won?

If you cannot identify a recent instance of Scripture overriding your instincts — whether your long-term patterns or your split-second reactions — there is a reasonable chance you are following an edited Jesus.

That is not submission to a king. That is Joab with a plan. That is Peter with a sword.

And notice this: Joab acted alone and in secret.

That was the dead giveaway. He never submitted his plan to anyone who might have challenged it.

This is why God gives us the community of his people — other believers who know Scripture, who walk with the Spirit, who can see your blind spots when you cannot.

If you are making significant decisions about your life, your ministry, your relationships — and you have never exposed your reasoning to a fellow believer who loves you enough to say, "I think you're wrong" — you are operating the way Joab operated.

The answer is not to try harder. The answer is to listen harder —

- to the King's word,
 - to the King's Spirit,
 - and to the King's people.
-

We have gone all the way into the deepest room of the house — the place where active, sincere, energetic servants of the King discover that they have been following a king of their own invention.

- Not a failure of entry.

- Not a failure of knowledge.
- Not a failure of confession.

A failure of daily, ongoing, real-time obedience – the kind that only shows up when the King's word and your instincts collide in a moment that costs you something.

We have explored four signs of whether Jesus is truly our king.

1. Willing reception at the front door.
2. Knowledge without obedience just inside.
3. A foundation that was never poured because repentance never happened.
4. And in the deepest room, overriding the King's word while believing you are serving him faithfully.

Each step took us further inside – and each step revealed a subtler, more hidden failure.

Now – if those diagnostics have unsettled you, I have something important to say.

CONCLUSION

You may be sitting here thinking: this King sounds demanding.

- He calls resistance satanic.
- He requires repentance, not deals.
- His word overrides my instincts.
- He asks for things that feel costly, painful, even frightening.

This King does not feel safe.

In C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the children ask about Aslan – the great lion, the Christ figure of the story – and Mr. Beaver answers:

"Safe? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

He is not safe. But he is good.

And I need to finish both stories to show you how good he is.

Back in Hebron — I told you that David made peace with Abner. But I haven't told you what that peace looked like.

[READ] "And 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." (2 Samuel 3:20b–21)

- A feast.
- A covenant.
- "He went in peace."

Peace — after years of war. Grace — for a man who deserved none of it.

And this depended not on any goodness in Abner, but on the goodness of David.

The king received the man who had fought against him.

Now — the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Early morning, after the resurrection.

Peter denied Jesus three times.

He had failed every diagnostic we have looked at this morning.

- He knew the truth and didn't want parts of it to be true.
- He could not confess his weakness.
- He overrode the King's word with a sword.
- And then he denied he even knew the King at all.

If anyone was beyond receiving, it was Peter.

And Jesus found him.

Peter had gone back to fishing — back to the life he had before Jesus called him. Maybe he thought the King was done with him.

Jesus made breakfast.

And then he asked Peter three times — once for every denial: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" (John 21:15–17).

Not to punish. To restore.

- "Feed my lambs."
- "Tend my sheep."
- "Feed my sheep."

He gave Peter back his calling. He gave Peter back his place in the kingdom.

The King received the man who had denied him.

Do you hear the echo?

David received Abner — and it depended on the goodness of David. Jesus received Peter — and it depended on the goodness of Jesus.

Paul writes: "You who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death" (Colossians 1:21–22).

It depends not on any goodness in you, but on the goodness of the King.

So if the King is this good — if he receives rebels and restores sinners — then what is left for you to do?

Most people answer with a question that sounds right but doesn't go deep enough. The question is . . .

- Not "Do you believe in Jesus?" — Abner believed. Peter confessed.
- Not "Are you loyal to Jesus?" — Joab was loyal. Peter pledged to die.
- Not "Have you come to Jesus?" — Abner came without repentance. Peter came without confessing his weakness.

The question is deeper than all of those.

The question is the one we started with — the most important question in life, the one that determines everything else, the one no achievement or failure can answer for you:

Who is your king?

If you have never received him — receive him today. Not tomorrow. Not when you feel ready. Not when you've cleaned yourself up. Today. The way Judah came to Hebron — willingly, gladly, without conditions.

If you have been resisting what you know to be true — stop fighting. The King you are resisting is stronger than your resistance, and more gracious than you deserve.

If you came once but never truly repented — come again. This time with honesty. This time with the words Abner never said: "I was wrong."

If you have been overriding his word with your own judgment — put down the sword. Open his word. Listen to his Spirit. Walk with his people. Let the actual King be your King.

He is not safe. But he is good.

He is more patient with you than you have any right to expect.

And he is waiting to receive you – not because of your goodness, but because of his.

Please, receive him. Receive him today.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we are not strong enough to be our own kings. We never were. Thank you for receiving us – not because we got it right, but because you are good. Forgive us where we have resisted. Break us where we are proud. We surrender. You are our King. We receive you. Amen.

Benediction:

Go now under the reign of the King who is still Almighty, still risen, still reigning. May His grace carry you. His word hold you. And let us remember that He is our King – yesterday, today, and forever. We are dismissed.