

**2 Samuel 3:1-39**

**SI:** Every passage in the Bible shows us either our need for salvation or God’s provision of salvation in Christ. Sometimes both. Usually emphasizes one. So think about that as I read.

**INTRO:** You know that stanza in *Sweet Home Alabama* that goes:

In Birmingham, they love the governor (Boo, boo, boo!)  
Now we all did what we could do,  
Now Watergate does not bother me,  
Does your conscience bother you?  
Tell the truth.

According to Ronnie VanZant that’s a criticism of George Wallace’s racial politics. His support of brutality against civil rights demonstrators in Birmingham to maintain the support of his voting base.

The song is saying: Don’t tar all white Alabamians with that brush.

Some of us are against him. Boo, boo, boo.

And then the reference to Watergate makes the point that political corruption is not just in Montgomery, it’s also in Washington, and we’re not going to accuse every American for being complicit in the Richard Nixon scandal.

Whether that’s a good argument or not, there is bound to be disagreement.

But everybody would agree that there is political corruption at every level. There are all sorts of self-serving and cynical and brutal things people do and say to gain power and stay in power.

Allison and I were out one night about a year ago and there was a live band, and they were playing *Sweet Home Alabama* and they changed the lyrics.

They said:

Watergate does not bother me,  
does Bentley’s girlfriend bother you? Tell the truth!

Which was, as you know, a reference to the governor’s sex scandal, and the humiliating recording of his conversation with his mistress.

It all sounds like 2 Samuel 3. This chapter is full of dirty politics.

There is lying, posturing, maneuvering, disloyalty, using religious speech, using violence. In this chapter powerful men do what they want sexually and use sex and women for political gain.

And there are little people who are collateral damage.

It's an ugly, dirty chapter.

Why is it in the Bible?

Remember what I said before we read?

Every passage of Scripture shows us either our need for salvation,  
or God's provision of salvation. That's what this does.

This chapter doesn't allow you to say in the deepest sense—

That's not me. Watergate does not bother me. That's those dirty politicians.

Instead, through the lens of dirty politics it shows us our own hearts  
in all their self-serving ugliness and sin, how much we need salvation.  
And then it shows us how God provides it for us in Christ.

So here's how I want to look at this passage.

First, dirty politics is a window into our hearts

Second, God's gracious salvation in Christ

**MP#1 First, passage illustrates four ways dirty politics a window into hearts**  
**The first way is what we could call the social sins of the day**

I'm looking here at David's polygamy.

Politicians and those in leadership often participate in the social sins of the day, and it's easy to criticize them for that. But we are susceptible to the same sins. And if we had the power and means, would probably commit them ourselves on a much grander scale than we do. That ought to humble us.

David had six wives in Hebron.

The names of his wives are listed along with their first born sons. David eventually accumulated more wives and concubines and he had a great many more children by them. Even later in this chapter he gets another wife. Michal, who was Saul's daughter and who had been David's wife, he gets her back from her husband who loves her, so she's number seven. More about her later.

Was it ok back then to be a polygamist? Or was it wrong?

If it was wrong, why doesn't it say something like: And this displeased the Lord? For that matter, why doesn't the Bible condemn Abraham for taking two concubines in addition to wife Sarah? Or Jacob for two wives, two concubines?

Here's the answer:

It was wrong and the Bible does condemn them. Genesis 2 says:

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh.

Jesus Christ himself quotes this in Matthew 19 and says this was God's will for marriage from the beginning. One man and one woman, two as one flesh. David and even Abraham were going against God's creation will.

Rather than explicitly pointing out David's sin and foolishness directly, it does so by showing the long-term consequences.

Every polygamist marriage in the Old Testament was full of trouble and fighting and favoritism and jealousy. David's so bad, death of three sons in list. But polygamy was socially acceptable back then, even expected for kings.

So as a politician and a man in the public eye, David even more susceptible to it. It was not just sexual, was political. Marrying daughters of neighboring kings. That's how it often is with people in political office, susceptible to social sins.

But we are too, just on a smaller level.

Every society, and every era, and every generation has it's own social sins.

Things that the Bible speaks against, but they are so acceptable that even believers are often blinded to them.

Think of the terrible abuses and evils of colonialism.

Those in political power may have been guilty of the most flagrant offenses, but many Christians supported colonialism of the British Empire, for example. Or what about the American South and chattel slavery?

An evil the Bible condemns from several directions, upheld by politicians, but also supported by many believing men and women in the pews. What's the social sin of our day? Probably love of money and luxury. We're deaf to much of what the Bible says on this subject.

Lord, give me neither poverty nor wealth, says the wise man in Proverbs. It's easy to point the finger at greedy politicians, but they are window into our own love for materialism and luxury. Sins of politicians ought to humble us.

### **Second way dirty politics a window is in the cynical pursuit of self-interest**

I'm looking here at Abner in this episode where he gets angry with Ishbosheth, and switches his loyalties to David.

It starts out saying:

Abner had been strengthening his own position in the house of Saul. That really says it all. Instead of strengthening the position of the house of Saul, he was strengthening his own position. Abner was all about Abner. He was all about pursuing his own self-interest. Abner is cynical in the sense that he doesn't really believe any of the reasons and justifications he uses for pursuing his own interests. He's just using them for their political effect. This is so true to life.

He slept with one of King Saul's concubines, a woman named Rizpah.

This wasn't just for sexual gratification. It was a power play. Sleeping with the dead king's woman raised him to king's level. Sex and politics. And look how he responds when Ishbosheth questions him. He gets angry and indignant and tries to turn Ishbosheth into the bad guy. How dare you question my loyalty to the house of your father Saul! But Abner had put Ishbosheth on the throne to be his puppet. Not loyalty to Saul. He was looking for an excuse to jump ship because he realizes not working out. And how dare you make a sexual accusation! That's none of your business. But illicit sexual affairs always impact other people. Abner is able to use his political clout and force of speech to gain upper hand.

There's another detail that I especially interesting.

It's when Abner says: I swear to God, I'm going to help David get the kingdom. Because the LORD promised David Saul's kingdom. He doesn't just say God, he says the LORD, Yahweh. Personal name of God. Later he uses the same argument with the elders of Israel when persuading them.

The LORD promised to use David to rescue us from Philistines.  
He sounds like a believer but he's using religious speech for political advantage.  
If he really believed this, he would have supported David from the beginning.  
We see all these same cynical tactics in politics today, using bombastic accusatory speech to silence a whistleblower, faked outrage, faked moral superiority, faked religious devotion and religious speech.

But isn't this just a window into our own hearts?

We may not do this on a public platform, but these are the sorts of tactics we use in our home and sometimes in our workplace or even our church.

Anything to turn the negative attention away from ourselves and keep our self interests from getting derailed.

Saying something like: I just feel like the Lord is telling me to do such and such.

The Lord isn't telling you anything.

You're using that language to deflect someone from questioning you about your decision to do such and such.

Or going on the offensive: That's none of your business.

When as a matter of fact, in church community it is your pastor's business.

### **The third way dirty politics is a window is the misery of innocent victims**

I'm looking here at the little, sad scene right in the middle of this maneuvering and politicking by powerful men

It's the tears of this man Paltiel when his wife, Michal, is taken from him.

Let me give you a quick background.

Michal was one of King Saul's daughters.

Saul heard she loved David, so he gave her to David as his wife.

His motives weren't good, he was hoping to use his daughter to undermine David.

But Michal really loved David and even defied her father for him.

They were only married for a few months when David had to go on the run from

Saul. So Saul took Michal and gave her as wife to another man, this man Paltiel.

Michal and Paltiel had been married about 15 years.

When Abner reached out to David to switch loyalties, David said:

Bring me my wife Michal and we'll talk. So Abner went and took her.

Her husband of 15 years followed weeping but he was powerless to do anything.

Abner turned to him and said: Go back home. So he went back.

There's nothing to suggest that David loved Michal or that he demanded her return out of personal affection.

All the indications are that she became neglected co-wife with the other six

wives David had acquired.

David wanted her back because she was Saul's daughter. Political reasons.

Like Abner sleeping with Saul's concubine.

We're not told here about Michal's feelings at being wrenched away from a husband who obviously loved her. But later, in chapter 6, we learn that Michal was deeply embittered at David.

Why did the biblical writer include this detail, especially this pitiful scene of Paltiel following his wife weeping, then being told to just go home?

I think it's to show us the human price of political power.

It's to show how ordinary people suffer because of the plans of the great.

Even David's rise to power had a human cost.

Paltiel loved his wife but that didn't count for anything.

He was collateral damage in the political power plays of Abner and David.

We could give a thousand examples of how politicians have made decisions for their own advantage that have brought misery on innocent people.

Those dirty politicians!

Let's look at ourselves instead.

Your sinful and selfish decisions don't happen in a vacuum.

There are people in your life, sometimes little people and weak people, who will suffer the collateral damage from your decisions, and have suffered.

Children weep into their pillows because mom or dad has left the family, left for some big, grown up reason, to find themselves, or to be happy with someone else.

Wives are made fearful by the bad temper of their husbands.

Husbands are made miserable by the discontentment of their wives.

The peace of a church body robbed by criticism of a few members or the foolishness of the pastor.

David didn't know or care about the human cost, there was something he wanted and he had good reasons so he did it and brought misery to innocent victims.

Apart from God's grace we will do the same.

### **The fourth way dirty politics is a window into hearts is how it shows the dark impulses of jealousy and vengeance**

I'm looking at Joab's murder of Abner.

Remember Abner killed Joab's younger brother Asahel in battle.

He warned him twice, quit chasing me, don't mess with me.

Turn aside and fight someone else.

How can I look your brother Joab in the face if I kill you?

Abner didn't want to kill Asahel, but he had to defend himself, so he killed him in battle. We read about that last week.

Abner came to David and gave him his loyalty.

He promised to convince the elders of Israel to accept David's kingship.

And David send Abner away in peace. That's important to see.

By the way, Asahel, who Abner had killed, was David's nephew,

the youngest son of David's sister Zeruah. Certainly David grieved his death.

But he was a military man and understood Abner had acted as a soldier must.

When Joab found out Abner and come and gone he was furious.

There was bound to be some jealousy here. Clear David had a higher regard for Abner as a man than he did Joab. Joab knew that and was threatened.

He first tried to turn David against Abner, claimed he was a spy.

When that didn't work, he sent messengers to Abner without David's knowledge.

Met him in a private location and stabbed him in the stomach.

The writer of 2 Samuel doesn't often tell us people's motives, does in this instance.

We're told: It was to avenge his brother Asahel that Joab killed Abner.

David goes to great lengths to distance himself from this murder.

That's what the end of the chapter is about.

David gives Abner an honorable burial and writes a eulogy and fasts in mourning.

The last thing David says is another ominous foreshadowing:

These sons of Zeruah are too strong for me.

His nephews Joab and Abishai, especially Joab, were men of vengeance.

Fortunately we don't live in a country where political opponents murder each other out of jealousy and revenge. That's because God's blessed America.

It happens in other places. But we still see these dark impulses.

There is violent speech, expressing a wish political opponents were dead.

We also have character assassination. Attempts to ruin a person that way.

What this shows is that if people had power and if they feel are above the law, if they aren't restrained externally, then these things would come out.

My point has been, it's not just politicians, our hearts apart from God's grace.

Bible even warns Christians about bitterness, reminds us vengeance belongs to the Lord, not to us. Obviously we need that message.

Remember I said every passage of Scripture emphasizes either our need for salvation or God's provision of salvation.

This one clearly emphasizes our need. This is a window into our hearts.

Politicians and powerful men just have a bigger stage. We have small stage.

So where's God's salvation in this passage? Let's look at

## **MP#2 God's gracious salvation in Christ**

The passage ends with many proofs, many evidences, that David was not complicit in Joab's murder of Abner. Told numerous time he sent Abner away in peace.

It says he did not know Joab had recalled Abner.

David insisted on an honorable burial.

He took a prominent place in the funeral, walked behind the bier.

He wrote a eulogy for Abner, he fasted and refused to eat even after funeral.

A cynical person might look at this and say David was trying he was trying to give a political impression. But that's not true.

He really was innocent of Abner's murder. He really did grieve.

And there are two verses that are keys to understanding this episode. First:

So on that day all the people and all Israel knew that the king had no part in the murder of Abner son of Ner.

In the second key verse David says:

I am weak, and these sons of Zeruijah are too strong for me.

The first verse:

All the people. That's a reference to all those with David in Hebron.

The tribe of Judah, the southern half of the kingdom.

All Israel. That's a reference to the northern tribes. Those Abner had been meeting with to bring them over to David and accept him as king.

So all the people in south and north knew David had no part in murder.

They actually viewed David in a more favor, more approval for how handled this.

The point is that Joab's reckless and evil act did not torpedo

the negotiations that were underway to reunite Israel under David.

So after all this political drama, and all the evil intentions of men,

God's purposes still stand and he is working out his plan establish David's throne.

And what God does on a grand scale and on the big stage, he does in your life.

God will not allow your sins and self serving actions to torpedo his plans for you.

Romans 8:28, And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

You might say: I can understand all things could include evil things outside me, bad events that happen, being caught in bad situations out of my control.

But does all things even include my sins?

Yes it does. We've already seen two of David's sins in this chapter—

his polygamy and his cruelty to Michal and her husband.

And David will sin more spectacularly than this in coming chapters.

But the Lord is with him, working out his plan.

Someone might think this is an excuse for sin, or no big deal.  
Of course that's not right. Sin still has temporal consequences. Misery.  
But bigger than that, if this is the way God treats you, then you should try with all  
your might to please him. If you love me, do what I command.  
That's the first key verse. God forgives us and continues to work his purposes.

Second key verse a strange one, where David says:

I am weak and these sons of Zeruah are too strong for me.

What does that mean? It's more foreshadowing.

And it's an indication of how much David is going to suffer as Israel's king.  
Joab is going to cause David great pain.

He's going to be this negative presence in David's life at key moments.

When David needs mercy and kindness, he's going to get harshness from Joab.  
You'll wonder many times why David doesn't get rid of Joab.

Good and bad reasons, but the good reason was David had the bigger interests  
of Israel in mind. He knew what Joab could give Israel as a military man.

You could say it was for the love of Israel that David accepted this thorn  
in his side. And in all this suffering, David is a prototype of Jesus Christ.

Jesus not only suffered the abuse of evil men on the cross to secure his kingdom,  
he loves you so much that he will continue to suffer your selfish, disloyal,  
and hurtful acts, and extend to you forgiveness again and again.

Old hymn, *Ah, Holy Jesus, How Hast Thou Offended*. German hymn.

About how our sins are directed and Jesus and caused his pain, but he loves us.

Last stanza:

Therefore, kind Jesus, since I cannot pay thee,/I do adore thee, and will ever pray thee

Think on thy pity and thy love unswerving,/Not my deserving.

Let's not fall into the trap of saying, it's those evil people out there.

It's those dirty politicians. Accept instead the Bible's assessment of your heart.

And then turn to the Lord who works all things for your good,  
who is long-suffering with your frequent failures,  
and who loves you.