

OCTOBER 11TH, 2026

KINGDOM: WHAT A KING BEHOLDS

WHEN HESED IS REFUSED

A six-day guided reading from 2 Samuel 10, where a king sends kindness across the border and gets his messengers back with half a beard. Written for someone who's heard this sermon, in the room or however you caught it since, and for someone who hasn't; you don't need the sermon to follow along. Read one day at a time, and read the verses out loud if you can.

DAY 1 — SENT WITH KINDNESS

Read: 2 Samuel 10:1–2; 1 Chronicles 19:1–2

It begins with a funeral.

> **After this the king of the Ammonites died, and Hanun his son reigned in his place.**
>
> **2 Samuel 10:1 (ESV)**

A king dies, his son takes the throne, and in that world that's a dangerous week, because the new king is untested and the neighbors start doing math. And this neighbor is David, fresh off a long run of victories. Nobody would have been shocked to read that David saw an opening and took it.

Here's what he says instead.

> **And David said, "I will deal loyally with Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father dealt loyally with me." So David sent by his servants to console him concerning his father.**
>
> **2 Samuel 10:2 (ESV)**

Hear that phrase? "Deal loyally." It's the same Hebrew verb and the same Hebrew noun as chapter 9, where David asks who's left that he can "show kindness" to for Jonathan's sake. The word is *ḥesed*, covenant loyalty. English splits it into two phrases. The Hebrew doesn't.

But the ground under it is different. In chapter 9, David was keeping an oath. Here he tells us why in a single phrase: *as his father dealt loyally with me.* Somebody was loyal to me, so I'll be loyal to his son. The Chronicler says it even more plainly: "for his father dealt kindly with me" (1 Chronicles 19:2).

That's not heroic. It's decent. It's what you do when someone has stood by you: you show up when their father dies.

What did Nahash do for David? We don't know. The writer never says. People have guessed for a long time (the years on the run from Saul, a shared enemy), but the text didn't think we needed it. And what was David after? You could suspect a political angle. Maybe there was one. I'm fond of saying I've never had a pure motive in my life. Neither have you. Neither did David. But I'm not going to hand him a worse motive than the text does. I'm going to stay where the text stays.

One more thing. "Console" isn't a sympathy card. It names something public: sending messengers into a partner's court to mourn with him, and to say, *I'm still with you. You don't have to be afraid of me.*

And David doesn't go himself. He sends. Somebody else carries his kindness across the border, in their own robes, with his name on it. A kindness you send isn't yours anymore. You don't get to decide what happens to it. That's scary. Tomorrow we'll see what happens to them. For today, think about the kindness you've been meaning to send, and what it costs to let it leave your hands.

> **Reflect:** Is there a kindness you've been carrying for someone? A thank-you, a note, a visit you owe? If the person is gone now, what would it look like to honor what they did some other way?
>
> **Pray:** *Lord, You know the kindnesses I've been meaning to send. Make me brave enough to send them, and don't let me hold them until it's too late. And when I can't deliver one, keep it for me. Amen.*

DAY 2 — IN YOUR EYES

Read: 2 Samuel 10:3; 1 Samuel 16:7

The envoys arrive. And Hanun doesn't receive them alone.

> **But the princes of the Ammonites said to Hanun their lord, "Do you think, because David has sent comforters to you, that he is honoring your father? Has not David sent his servants to you to search the city and to spy it out and to overthrow it?"**
>
> **2 Samuel 10:3 (ESV)**

Listen to what the princes are doing. They aren't telling Hanun what happened. They're telling him what he's *seeing.* "Do you think…?" is a Hebrew idiom that literally says "in your eyes." It's just how the language says "in your judgment." Nothing mystical about it. But in a chapter that's about to be full of people looking at things and acting, it's hard to miss.

Then the second question: search the city, spy it out, overthrow it. Each one a step worse than the last. Look around, report back, tear down.

Here's the hard part. They weren't crazy. David had come down hard on Moab, right next door, not long before (2 Samuel 8:2). Kings really do send envoys to look over a city. And most of us know what it is to get burned, and then to hear a quiet voice say, *If it looks too good, it can't be true.* When I read this verse, I understand it. That's what makes it sad instead of silly.

And it was wrong. The narrator gives us no evidence that David bore ill intent towards Hanun. Think of what Hanun could have seen: a hand held out to him at his father's funeral. Instead the lens goes on, cynicism and suspicion, and he acts. Advisers advise. He made a choice. "My advisers told me" doesn't clear him.

So hold two things together. Life really does teach us to be suspicious, and the suspicion usually has a story behind it. *And* taking counsel is no defense for what we do with it. Neither one cancels the other.

There's a verse earlier in this same book that describes what's going on.

> **But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."**
>
> **1 Samuel 16:7 (ESV)**

That was the day God chose a king, and the king He chose was David. The princes of Ammon never heard those words, as far as we know. But they're sitting right there in the same story, and they describe what Hanun's court is doing: looking at the outside of a gesture and deciding what's inside.

Here's one more thing. We're blind to our own blind spots. By definition. Which means we need somebody to see for us, and so who we let do the seeing really matters.

> **Reflect:** When someone does something kind for you, whose voice shows up in your head? And whose ear are you in? Is there a whisper you've passed along lately?
>
> **Pray:** *Lord, show me what's actually in front of me. Let me hear the voices around me without handing them my eyes. And where I've been the whisper, forgive me. Amen.*

DAY 3 — UNTIL YOUR BEARDS HAVE GROWN

Read: 2 Samuel 10:4–5

> **So Hanun took David's servants and shaved off half the beard of each and cut off their garments in the middle, at their hips, and sent them away.**
>
> **2 Samuel 10:4 (ESV)**

I don't love reading that. But let's say what it is, and no more. A beard was a man's dignity, and shaving half of it left him looking like a joke. Cutting his robes off at the hips took away his cover. It was exposure, a deliberate humiliation, and then Hanun sent these men back down the road like that, in front of everybody.

Four verbs, one man. He took. He shaved. He cut. He sent them away.

Now picture the men. They hadn't done anything wrong. They walked into a foreign court carrying someone else's kindness, and the shame meant for the sender landed on them. In that world an envoy stood in for the king who sent him, so an insult to the envoy was an insult to the king. David took every blow. But the men felt it in their own bodies.

If you've ever offered somebody a gift, or an apology, or a way back, and watched it get thrown in your face, you know there's a second sting. It wasn't just *no.* It was *no* with people watching.

Now look at verse 5.

> **When it was told David, he sent to meet them, for the men were greatly ashamed. And the king said, "Remain at Jericho until your beards have grown and then return."**
>
> **2 Samuel 10:5 (ESV)**

First, somebody told him. The text doesn't say who. Somebody saw what had happened and went to say so. Second, David *sent.* Again. This is the same verb that's been running through the chapter, and this time he sends it toward the shamed.

And the narrator doesn't hurry them past it. The men were "greatly ashamed." That's the word for being humiliated. He names it plainly.

Then listen to what David says. He doesn't say, "Come home." He doesn't say, "Get over it." He sends them to Jericho, a small, sparsely populated town, and tells them, *Stay until it grows back.* He gives them time, and he gives them room.

The text records no rage here. No speech about vengeance. Whatever comes next in this chapter, this comes first: a king who goes to the people who were hurt carrying his name.

I'm not asking you to decide today who the Hanun in your story was. The question is smaller. Were you met? Think back to the last time you were hurt carrying something for somebody else. Did anyone come find you? And if no one did, hear this: the King who sent you saw it, and He cares.

> **Reflect:** Has anyone met you in a place of shame you were carrying for someone else's sake? Is there someone you could go meet? If no one came for you, tell God so, out loud, today.
>
> **Pray:** *Lord, You know what it's like to carry another's name into a room that didn't want it. Meet me where I've been shamed, and give me a quiet place and the time I need. And teach me to be the kind of person who goes to meet others. Amen.*

DAY 4 — MAY THE LORD DO WHAT SEEMS GOOD TO HIM

Read: 2 Samuel 10:6–12; 1 Samuel 3:17–18

War arrives, and it arrives fast.

> **When the Ammonites saw that they had become a stench to David, the Ammonites sent and hired the Syrians of Beth-rehob, and the Syrians of Zobah…**
>
> **2 Samuel 10:6 (ESV)**

That's their own verdict on themselves. They know what they've done. They know they've poked the bear, so they buy help from the north and east. David hears about it and sends Joab and "all the host of the mighty men" (10:7). Joab arrives and looks around.

> **When Joab saw that the battle was set against him both in front and in the rear, he chose some of the best men of Israel and arrayed them against the Syrians.**
>
> **2 Samuel 10:9 (ESV)**

He's boxed in, front and back. So he splits his army. He takes the hard side himself, gives the rest to his brother Abishai, and says:

> **"If the Syrians are too strong for me, then you shall help me, but if the Ammonites are too strong for you, then I will come and help you. Be of good courage, and let us be courageous for our people, and for the cities of our God, and may the Lord do what seems good to him."**
>
> **2 Samuel 10:11–12 (ESV)**

Look at that last clause. It's the only place in the whole chapter where God's name gets spoken.

Everybody in this chapter is deciding what to see. The princes tell Hanun what to see. Hanun acts on it. The Ammonites see they've become a stench. Joab sees he's trapped. Then Joab says, *may the Lord do what seems good to him.* The Hebrew is *the good in his eyes.* It's the same plain idiom as the princes' "in your eyes." Only now the eyes aren't Hanun's or Joab's. They're the Lord's.

We've heard that sentence before.

> **So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It is the LORD. Let him do what seems good to him."**
>
> **1 Samuel 3:18 (ESV)**

That's Eli, an old man, getting the hardest news of his life about his own house, and laying it in God's hands. A different moment, and the same instinct: *the verdict isn't mine.*

Joab's sentence is faith. It isn't a shrug. Joab doesn't quit. He splits the army, takes the hard side, promises to come help his brother. He does what he can, all of it. And then he leaves the outcome with Someone who sees better than he does. That's very different from "nothing ever works out," which is what cynicism says. One hands the verdict to God. The other hands it to despair.

> **Reflect:** What's the thing you've done everything you can about? Can you say "may the Lord do what seems good to him" over it, and mean "I trust You," not "I give up"? What's the difference in your body when you say each one?
>
> **Pray:** *Lord, I've done what I can. Take what I can't. Let me leave it with You, and don't let me call giving up trust. Amen.*

DAY 5 — SOMEONE WHO SEES BETTER

Read: 2 Corinthians 10:1–7; Isaiah 11:1–4; Isaiah 9:6

Let's go to a different city with the same problem. Paul started the church in Corinth and stayed a year and six months (Acts 18:11). Then he left. And after he left, some people there started sizing him up. There were other teachers by then. Richer. Smoother. Paul didn't have that. He worked for a living, and in person he wasn't impressive. So the question started going around: *what kind of apostle lives like that?* Imagine being the one they were talking about.

Here's how he answers.

> **I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!**
>
> **2 Corinthians 10:1 (ESV)**

What does he point to? Not his title. Not his credentials. The way Christ came. A manger: "she… laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7). A donkey: "Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey" (Matthew 21:5). Not flashy. Not by any standard Corinth would have recognized. Then he gets to the point.

> **Look at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ's, so also are we.**
>
> **2 Corinthians 10:7 (ESV)**

The Greek behind "before your eyes" is built on the word for "face." And the verb can be a command or a statement: *look at what's in front of your face,* or *you're looking at what's in front of your face.* Either way it's a rebuke. They were reading surfaces.

Do you hear the echo? Somebody sends a kindness, and it gets measured by the world's standards and thrown out. Paul may never have had Ammon in mind. But the shape is the same, and so is the cure. Paul's cure isn't "don't listen to anybody." It's to measure what you're seeing against Christ himself. A few verses earlier he says his weapons are "not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:4). That power is given. We don't have to manufacture it.

And here's where the prophet comes in. Isaiah describes a king from David's own line:

> **There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse… And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might… He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor.**
>
> **Isaiah 11:1–4, selected (ESV)**

Read that slowly. *He shall not judge by what his eyes see.* That's the one thing Hanun couldn't do. And it's what Isaiah says this king will do. And Isaiah calls him "Wonderful Counselor" (Isaiah 9:6).

So here's the sentence I'd leave you with. We need someone who sees better. But don't hear this wrong. It doesn't mean you don't need anyone else. Counsel is often how He speaks. He gave us each other, and His Spirit, for exactly that. But every other voice gets measured against His. He isn't one adviser among many. He's the King.

And there's rest in that. You don't have to see everything. You don't have to be right about every person. You have Somebody who sees better.

> **Reflect:** Where are you judging by the face of things right now: a person, a church, a situation, yourself? Have you asked Him how He sees it?
>
> **Pray:** *Lord Jesus, You see what I can't. Don't let me judge by what my eyes see. Be my Counselor, and give me the humility to be counseled. Amen.*

DAY 6 — AS THE FATHER HAS SENT ME

Read: John 20:19–21; John 15:20–21; 2 Corinthians 5:20

Remember David's messengers?

The honor of the one who sends travels with the ones he sends. So does his shame. That was true in the Ammonite court, and Jesus says it's true for us.

> **Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."**
>
> **John 20:21 (ESV)**

You're sent. Not just loved. Not just rescued. Sent. Paul puts a name on it:

> **Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.**
>
> **2 Corinthians 5:20 (ESV)**

Now, what happens to ambassadors? Jesus doesn't leave us guessing.

> **Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.**
>
> **John 15:20–21 (ESV)**

There are two outcomes in it. "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you." *And* "if they kept my word, they will also keep yours." Some will welcome you and some won't, and you're not in charge of which.

Here's what I want you to take from that. When a door slams, it doesn't always mean what you're afraid it means. Sometimes the *no* has more to do with who sent you than with you. But be careful. That doesn't mean every *no* is about Jesus. Sometimes it's about our tone, or our timing, or the way we said it. And rejection isn't proof you were right, any more than acceptance is proof you were great.

If somebody who said they spoke for Jesus hurt you, I'm sorry. That's real. But a messenger who burned you doesn't get to tell you who the Sender is. And if you're the one who slammed the door on a messenger, the King who sent them sees better than either of you. He's not asking you to beat yourself up.

Some days you go out with a kindness and come home hurt. It's okay to say so. But what defines you isn't how any door answers. It's the One who made you for Himself, and who rescued you through His broken body and His shed blood.

You didn't send yourself. He did.

> **Reflect:** Who is the person you've been sent to, right now, with a word or a kindness? How have you been reading their response? Can you leave the answer with the One who sent you?
>
> **Pray:** *Father, You sent Your Son, and He sends me. I don't carry this on my own name. When doors open, keep me humble. When they slam, keep me from bitterness, and keep me from thinking I'm right just because somebody said no. Send me again. Amen.*