

The Life of David

David's Kindness to Mephibosheth

2 Samuel 9:1-13

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Scripture

Second Samuel 7 showed us the Davidic covenant and David's marvelous prayer in response to God's promise to him. Second Samuel 8 shows us how God's kingdom was established under David when he defeated all the surrounding nations. After David had reigned in Jerusalem for some time, he asked if there were any descendants of King Saul to whom David might show kindness for Jonathan's sake. He learned that Jonathan had a surviving son named Mephibosheth, though he was crippled in both his feet. Second Samuel 9 gives us a beautiful demonstration of kindness.

Let's read about David's kindness to Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 9:1-13:

¹And David said, "Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?"
²Now there was a servant of the house of Saul whose name was Ziba, and they called him to David. And the king said to him, "Are you Ziba?" And he said, "I am your servant."
³And the king said, "Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God to him?" Ziba said to the king, "There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in his feet."
⁴The king said to him, "Where is he?" And Ziba said to the king, "He is in the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar."
⁵Then King David sent and brought him from the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar.
⁶And Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, son of Saul, came to David and fell on his face and paid homage. And David said, "Mephibosheth!" And he answered, "Behold, I am your servant."
⁷And David said to him, "Do not fear, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan, and I will restore to you all the land of Saul your father, and you shall eat at my table always."
⁸And he paid

homage and said, "What is your servant, that you should show regard for a dead dog such as I?"

⁹Then the king called Ziba, Saul's servant, and said to him, "All that belonged to Saul and to all his house I have given to your master's grandson. ¹⁰And you and your sons and your servants shall till the land for him and shall bring in the produce, that your master's grandson may have bread to eat. But Mephibosheth your master's grandson shall always eat at my table." Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. ¹¹Then Ziba said to the king, "According to all that my lord the king commands his servant, so will your servant do." So Mephibosheth ate at David's table, like one of the king's sons. ¹²And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Mica. And all who lived in Ziba's house became Mephibosheth's servants. ¹³So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, for he ate always at the king's table. Now he was lame in both his feet. (2 Samuel 9:1-13)

Introduction

When I was a student at the University of Cape Town, I lived in Driekoppen Residence for three years. During my third year, I bought a goldfish and put him in a large bowl on my desk. The poor little goldfish had a crooked tail. I did not want to name the goldfish "Goldie" or "Fishy" or something like that. I wanted something different, something unique, something that could be a conversation starter. Since the goldfish had a crooked tail, I called him "Mephibosheth," after the young man who was crippled in his feet in Second Samuel 9. Well, Mephibosheth certainly was a conversation starter, beginning with the fact that most of my friends could not remember his name or how to say it.

I wish I knew then what I know now about Mephibosheth, and particularly about David's kindness to him. It is a wonderful story of kindness from which we all learn a great deal.

Lesson

Second Samuel 9:1-13 shows us a beautiful demonstration of kindness.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Kindness Is Initiated (9:1-4)
2. Kindness Is Provided (9:5-8)
3. Kindness Is Experienced (9:9-13)

I. Kindness Is Initiated (9:1-4)

First, kindness is initiated.

In verse 1, we read, **“And David said, ‘Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?’ ”** Let me remind you of the characters in this chapter.

Saul was king over all Israel, and David eventually succeeded him as king over all Israel. **Saul** and three of his sons, **Jonathan** and Abinadab and Malchi-shua died in a battle against the Philistines on Mount Gilboa.

Jonathan and David were best friends. Many years earlier, **Jonathan** understood that God was giving the kingdom to David, and he was wonderfully supportive. He made a covenant with David in which he made David promise, “...and do not cut off your steadfast love from my house forever, when the Lord cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth” (1 Samuel 20:15).

After things were quiet in his kingdom, David thought about his covenant with Jonathan and wondered if there was anyone of Saul’s household to whom he might show **kindness**.

The Hebrew word for **“kindness”** (*hesed*) is very important. It is used 249 times in the Old Testament. Its most common sense is “loyal love” and it is used that way 206 times. The sense of “loyal

love” is “an unflinching kind of love, kindness, or goodness; often used of God’s love that is related to faithfulness to his covenant.” When used in this way, it is usually translated as “steadfast love,” which is the same word that Jonathan used when he made David promise to “not cut off your *steadfast love* from my house forever.” The word used in 1 Samuel 20:15 (translated as “steadfast love”) is the same word used in 2 Samuel 9:1 (translated as “kindness”). **Kindness** has the sense of “a kind act” here and is translated that way 38 times in the Old Testament.

So, David wanted to fulfill his covenant promise to Jonathan. That is why he asked in verse 1, **“Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?”**

There is a very important lesson here for us. That lesson is the importance of keeping our covenant promises. Christians make covenant promises when they join the church. These are serious and significant promises that are unfortunately too often taken lightly. For example, church members promise that they will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ. And they promise to support the church in its worship and work to the best of their ability. Sadly, however, some Christians view the church as a club: one can participate as much or as little as one likes.

The most common covenant promise made is marriage vows. One man and one woman pledge faithful love to one another and no-one else. And this vow is often disregarded, judging by the large number of divorces in our culture. But, friends, this ought not to be so. We need to keep our vows.

Dr. Robertson McQuilkin served as the President of Columbia Bible College and Seminary for 22 years. Under his leadership, the institutions flourished and grew and enjoyed a worldwide reputation of producing Christians who served all around the globe. Just as he was heading into his peak years of service, Robertson’s wife, Muriel, was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s Disease. Over about

three years, she declined steadily. Robertson started working as often as possible from home, which was located on the campus about a half-mile from his office. As she continued to decline, she lost more and more of her ability to speak. But the one sentence she remembered, and often said was, “I love you.” When Robertson would go to the office, Muriel would often follow him, because of her love for him. She would make the trip as often as ten times a day. Sometimes at night, when Robertson helped her undress, he found bloody feet. Eventually, Robertson resigned as the President of Columbia Bible College and Seminary so that he could care full-time for Muriel. He writes, “When the time came, the decision was firm. It took no great calculation. It was a matter of integrity. Had I not promised, 42 years before, “in sickness and in health...till death do us part”?¹ Someone once asked Robertson if it was hard having to take care of his wife. He replied, “I don’t *have* to take care of her; I *get* to take care of her!”

David understood that covenant promises are meant to be kept. That is why he wanted to make sure that he was keeping his covenant promise to Jonathan when he asked, **“Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?”**

David was told of a servant of Saul’s named Ziba. **And the king said, “Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God to him?” Ziba said to the king, “There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in his feet.” The king said to him, “Where is he?” And Ziba said to the king, “He is in the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar”** (9:3-4). Second Samuel 4:4 tells us, “Jonathan, the son of Saul, had a son who was crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel, and his nurse took him up and fled, and as she fled in her haste, he fell and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth.”

¹ See http://media.mcquilklibrary.com/pdf/face_livingbyvows.pdf.

One commentator thinks that Mephibosheth was around twenty or twenty-one years of age at the time that David was looking to fulfill his promise to Jonathan.²

The lesson I want to emphasize here is that David took the initiative to fulfill his covenant promise to Jonathan. Mephibosheth did not take any initiative. He was utterly unaware of David's thinking and perhaps had never heard of David's covenant with Jonathan. He was living at **Lo-debar**, which means "no pasture." So, Mephibosheth was not only dispossessed of his family land but lived in a barren place, where there was no pasture. He was disabled, he was poor, and he was destitute.

Mephibosheth is a vivid description of every unbeliever. Every unbeliever is spiritually disabled, poor, and destitute.

But the good news of the gospel teaches us that David's Greater Son, Jesus, takes the initiative to bring kindness—God's steadfast love—to us.

Let us see how.

II. Kindness Is Provided (9:5-8)

Second, kindness is provided.

Verses 5-6a say, **"Then King David sent and brought him from the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar. And Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, son of Saul, came to David and fell on his face and paid homage."** In those days, when kings ascended to the throne, they killed every possible rival to the throne, especially family members of the previous king. That was actually what Jonathan did not want David to do when he ascended to the throne. However, Mephibosheth did not know this. One can imagine how terrified he felt when the king's emissaries brought him to David. He thought that he was about to have his

² Roy E. Gingrich, *The Book of 2nd Samuel* (Memphis, TN: Riverside Printing, 2002), 21–22.

head chopped off. He was entering the presence of the king only to have his identity confirmed before being killed. We read that **David said, “Mephibosheth!” And he answered, “Behold, I am your servant”** (9:6b). He had no reason whatsoever to expect any kindness from David.

Imagine Mephibosheth’s astonishment when **David said to him, “Do not fear, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan, and I will restore to you all the land of Saul your father, and you shall eat at my table always”** (9:7). This verse stands at the very center of this narrative. It is the key verse in the entire drama of this chapter.

The words **“do not fear”** often precede promises (cf. 1 Samuel 12:20; 22:23; 23:17). The promises come to people who have reason to be afraid. Mephibosheth had every reason to be afraid. But David quieted his fears by saying, **“...for I will show you kindness.”** The Hebrew is even stronger, **“...for I will *surely* show you kindness.”**

David’s promise to provide kindness to Mephibosheth points us to the promise of Jesus to provide kindness to us. Jesus once said, “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” We once were spiritually disabled, poor, and destitute. But, God will make us citizens of his kingdom and we will be with him forever.

The lesson for us is that Christians are the recipients of God’s unmerited and gracious kindness. We deserved nothing from God. We were languishing in a spiritual desert. But then, Jesus found us and saved us, and showed us his kindness. And our response to Jesus is the same as Mephibosheth’s to David, “Behold, I am your servant.” Having been saved by the grace of God, we are now servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is our joy and our privilege to serve him all the days of our lives.

So, kindness is initiated. And kindness is provided.

III. Kindness Is Experienced (9:9-13)

And third, kindness is experienced.

Then David called Ziba, Saul's servant, and told him that all that belonged to Saul and his family now belonged to Mephibosheth. Moreover, Ziba's sons and servants were to take care of and farm Mephibosheth's land so that he would always have bread to eat. Furthermore, Mephibosheth would always eat at David's table. Twice it is affirmed that Mephibosheth ate David's table. Verse 11b says, **“So Mephibosheth ate at David's table, like one of the king's sons.”** And verse 13a says, **“So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, for he ate always at the king's table.”**

About two weeks ago, Dr. J. I. Packer went home to be with the Lord, just a few days shy of his 94th birthday. A friend posted the following quotation from Dr. Packer on his Facebook page. I don't know in which book or paper it is written, but I did find it on the webpage of the Gospel Coalition, “Adoption is the highest privilege of the gospel. The traitor is forgiven, brought in for supper, and given the family name. To be right with God the Judge is a great thing, but to be loved and cared for by God the Father is greater.”³

Mephibosheth was not a traitor in the proper sense of the word. But, after the death of his grandfather, King Saul, things did not look at all good for him. He may very well have thought that David viewed him as a traitor. But David initiated kindness toward Mephibosheth, he provided kindness for Mephibosheth, and then Mephibosheth experienced the kindness of David. He was adopted, as it were, into David's family. He was viewed as part of David's family. And he was free to enjoy supper with David all the days of his life.

Again, David's actions point us to his Greater Son, Jesus

³ See <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/40-quotes-from-j-i-packer/>.

Christ. We experience the kindness of Jesus when we are the recipients of his grace. We are adopted into his family. And we are loved and cared for by the Father. We become co-heirs with Jesus.

Our son Jon was adopted on his first birthday. We went into court with our attorney. I believe I was holding Lauren and Eileen was holding Jon. The judge asked us to identify ourselves. Then he gave us a rather stern lecture that once the adoption was finalized that Jon would just as much our son as Lauren was our natural-born daughter. We were to treat him as if he were our natural-born child. In the eyes of the law, there is no difference between Lauren and Jon.

The lesson for us is that we experience the kindness of Jesus when we are adopted in the family of God. Before we were on the outside, but once the kindness of God came into our lives, we became adopted sons and daughters of the living God. And that is the highest privilege of the gospel.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the account of David's kindness to Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 9:1-13, let us be assured of God's kindness to us.

Are you sure that you have experienced the kindness of God in your life? Have you turned from your sin in repentance? And have you trusted in Jesus for the salvation of your soul? If you have never done so, let me urge you to do so right now.

And if you are assured of God's kindness to you, let me encourage you to share it with others.

Michael Bentley tells the story about when he was a young teenager there was a married couple in their church who were very kind to him. They were not very well off and they lived in a small rented house. The husband had a very poorly paid job and their possessions were very few. Although they had a radio, they had no

television or car but they were very generous to several of the youngsters. Every Sunday they invited them to tea and sometimes they also went back to their home after the evening service.

Michael enjoyed those Sundays, yet there was one thing that worried him: how was he ever going to be able to repay them for their kindness? The answer came one Sunday evening as they were listening to what was then called the BBC Home Service. Charles Maxwell, a former war correspondent, was telling his audience about his experiences during the recent war. He spoke about a time when he came across a group of soldiers who offered him a cup of tea and some food out of their meager rations.

As he left them he said, "It's unlikely that we shall ever meet again so how can I repay you for your kindness?"

One of the soldiers merely said, "Pass it on, mate."

Then Maxwell quoted a very old hymn from the Moody and Sankey collection,

Have you had a kindness shown?
Pass it on
'Twas not given for thee alone;
Pass it on
Let it travel down the years,
Let it wipe another's tears,
Till in heaven the deed appears—
Pass it on.⁴

Have you received the kindness of Jesus in your life? If you have, then pass it on. Amen.

⁴ Michael Bentley, *Face2Face with David: Encountering the Man after God's Heart*, ed. Simon J. Robinson, vol. 2, Face2Face Series (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2007), 49–50.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons.
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