



Do You Really Know the King?

A Study in Samuel

David and the Dead Dog

2 Samuel 9:1-13; 19:24-30

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Four-Legged Family Members

Over the years here, I have had the opportunity to hear about and even minister to some of the kindest, sweetest members of your families. Pongo. Fred. Cooper. Duke. Buddy. Myles. Penny. Louis. Sophie. Biscuit. Sparky. Martin. Parker. Anakin. Presley. Harper. One might say our ministry has gone to the dogs!

Those are just a few of your canine family members. We had dogs when I was a kid. We had a rough go with dogs for a while there. Blackie came home, met me and my two brothers and ran away within the hour. Bandit we had for about two weeks. He would hide under the hutch, and we would have to drag him out with the broom handle to play with him. Dad took Bandit up to my grandpa's farm where he became a great farm dog.

We had a dog named Heidi that had "issues" and attacked my older brother Kyle by biting him in the throat. My dad took Heidi to a very different farm, I'm afraid. Losing Heidi left us dogless until one terribly stormy evening. It was a real frog-strangler outside and I heard some scratching at our front door. I looked out and there was a mangy, nasty, filthy dog that I immediately invited inside and wrapped up in my mom's best quilt.

Since we had lost a Heidi, I immediately named this one Heidi. My dad took one look at us both and demanded we get rid of the dog. I begged and pleaded. My dad asked me to check for a collar but be careful because who knew what diseases that dog was carrying. No collar. Dad carried the muddy mess into the backyard and hosed her off right in the middle of that rainstorm, with lightning cracking and thunder popping.

As he washed the dog, he began to soften as Heidi's big brown eyes locked on him. She shook and shivered and whenever he went to hold her head, she would back away, as if expecting to be smacked. It broke my dad's heart. He sat there with us, rain soaked, and just held the dog.

When my mom asked what that all was, he simply said, “I think we have a new dog.” It was one of the most gracious moments I ever witnessed about my dad. He warmed some milk for her and set out some blankets for her in the cubby underneath his desk and that became her permanent spot.

It wasn't the first time in history that a pitiful creature was shown unmerited, surprising kindness. I invite you to 2 Samuel 9 this morning.

The Dog that Dined with King David

In the Ancient Near East, the family of a king who had been replaced by a usurper did not usually expect to receive kindness. New dynasties were usually accompanied by exterminating the family of the previous ruling family. It is how power would have been consolidated. David stands in stark contrast to this expectation. His treatment of Jonathan's lone surviving son, Mephibosheth is surprising considering it all.

However, if one is familiar with David's commitment to preserving Saul as God's anointed, this is consistent with that mindset. David has drawn a line at Saul's family. He won't cross that line. He determines to look for anyone related to Saul. Jonathan's son who was injured as a young child, dropped during by a nurse during a hasty getaway permanently damaged his feet. David has a servant assigned to care for Mephibosheth and gives Mephibosheth some of Saul's family's land. Even more surprising, David allows Mephibosheth a seat at the king's table, essentially granting him familial access to David.

Mephibosheth is moved by this incredible graciousness and asks a question. His question will lead us to a second, related question. The first question: Why does a king even consider to love a dead dog like me? Mephibosheth has a pretty humbled and broken understanding of himself. It's not that he is a just a dog. It isn't that he is a stray dog. He is a dead dog. Worthless. Crippled. Insignificant. Broken. Not worthy of being an object of grace. Expecting to be an object of wrath. He is a dead dog. But in this moment, because of the gracious nature of the king, that dead dog has it's day.

As we go about answering this question, it will lead us to ask and answer a second question: How should a dead dog love a king?

Covenant Loyalty

Why does a king love a dead dog? For David, the answer is bound up in the principle of *hesed*. *Hesed* is a Hebrew word translated for words such as mercy, love, compassion, grace and faithfulness. But that doesn't fully explain the concept. *Hesed* is more than emotion or feeling. It is a sense of love and loyalty that motivates a person to perform acts of mercy and compassion toward another.

David shows this *hesed* loyalty and love to Mephibosheth because David has not forgotten his covenant to Jonathan. The opening paragraph in 2 Samuel 9 contains several words linking it back to the covenant David made with Jonathan back in 1 Samuel 20. Primary among them is the word *kindness*. Jonathan asked David to show his family, his house, kindness.

This kindness characterizes covenant relationships. It can be communicated using many words: grace, loyalty, faithfulness, love, mercy, goodness. What makes this an act of "kindness" is that David is the king. He is in a position to help Mephibosheth. And it is emphasized here as a reminder of how covenant loyalty and love are unnatural and unlikely occurrences.

This concept has deep theological significance throughout the entire Old Testament. It points us to the life-sustaining grace of God that is graciously given to people, making it possible for them to have a relationship with God. Jonathan asked David for this kind of loyalty, asking for "the *hesed* of *Yahweh*," or the kindness of God. He asked David for David to extend the greatest possible kindness to his family. And David maintains that covenant loyalty by showing love to Mephibosheth.

That is why a king can love a dead dog. Because the king is inclined to loving and gracious acts of kindness due to his unique authority as the king. And the king maintains this abiding sense of covenant loyalty. It was true for King David and that dead dog Mephibosheth. And it is true for our King Jesus and the dead dogs that we are. Because of God's great love for us, He showed us the greatest kindness, the greatest grace, grace even stronger and greater than ALL of our sin. God proved His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.¹

¹ Romans 5:8

How to Love a King?

That is why King Jesus displayed such love toward us. Which leads us to ask: How should a dead dog love a king? Mephibosheth helps us answer this question also.

Further on up the road a spell from this account of 2 Samuel 9 in chapter 19, Mephibosheth reappears during the aftermath of Absalom's rebellion, a coup in which David's son took the throne for a short time and sent David back into hiding in the wilderness. (read 2 Samuel 19:24-30)

David had installed a man named Ziba, who had once served Saul, to oversee Mephibosheth. During the rebellion, Ziba lied and abandoned Mephibosheth, leaving him behind with Absalom, even though Mephibosheth wanted to go to David with Ziba. Ziba told David that Mephibosheth had been in cahoots with Absalom. Absalom was killed, the rebellion was quelled, and David is returning to Jerusalem and meets Mephibosheth along the way. Remember, David thinks Mephibosheth was a traitor.

You want to know how a "dead dog" is supposed to love a king? Mephibosheth reveals it in the last sentence in 19:30: "Since my lord the king has come to palace safely, let Ziba take it all." It may not seem like it at first, but that statement is a powerful proof of the love for a king.

Mephibosheth was deserted and treated unfairly by Ziba. David is pressed to decide on how to restore both men. He decides to split the difference and go halves with Ziba and Mephibosheth. They draw a line down the middle, and each get half. This is distinctly unfair to Mephibosheth. It was a raw deal. Mephibosheth dropped a quarter in the jukebox to listen to B.J. Thomas sing *Another Somebody Done Somebody Wrong Song*. In spite of all of that, Mephibosheth is not that concerned about some inheritance, because he loves the king more. Remember, it was the king who graciously blessed Mephibosheth with the inheritance initially. And in the words of Job, "the Lord gives, the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."²

Mephibosheth reveals how this love was formed in his heart for the king. He gives us snapshots of it in this passage. It provides for us a foundation that will allow us, the dead dogs that we are, to love our King Jesus.

² Job 1:21

“My lord the king is like an angel of God.” You can hear that sentiment of great admiration and awe for David. Mephibosheth greatly admires the king for all the king means to him.

“Do whatever you think best.” This statement is only able to be made through complete submission. So often when we speak of submission, it is in somewhat vaguely general terms. Here, we realize that we are to submit to the wisdom of the king, totally and completely. Surrender our wisdom to His so that we can better surrender our wills to Him.

“My grandfather’s entire family deserves death from my lord the king, but you set your servant among those who eat at your table.” We must be consistently, continually, refreshingly amazed by God’s grace. Mephibosheth never got over the fact that, despite being the grandson of the king’s greatest enemy, Saul, David took Mephibosheth in and treated him like a son to eat at his table. Never get over the grace of God. Never get used to it. Never get numb or indifferent to it. It was and is always will be one of the most incredible blessings. God, through his grace, adopted dirty dogs like you and me into his family, to treat like his own. “He brought me to the banquet hall, and he looked on me with love.”³

“What further right do I have to keep on making appeals to the king?” Mephibosheth reveals a deep maturity here. It is a depth of faith that requires a humility and a wisdom and discernment only possible through the Spirit. We must get to the place where we realize we have no rights, no claims of anything. We are not now, nor will we ever be “owed” anything. Many believers have been acclimated over time, especially if you grew up in an American church, to expect fringe benefits of faith.

Things like having our preferences constantly met. Things like assuming that we get to always do whatever we want to do. Benefits such as being able to claim faith in Christ, despite always sacrificing kingdom work, ministry and faith to make way for the busy-ness of life. We don’t have time for church this week. We’ve got that tournament. We don’t have time to help at this ministry or outreach event. We may be headed to Cucamonga Beach that day. I can’t be bothered to read and study my Bible today. There is a two-hour rabbit hole I plan on venturing down into on Tik Tok later today!

³ Song of Songs 2:4

Mephibosheth captures this attitude clearly when he asks simply, “What in the world do I have the right to expect? How can I be so entitled to think I deserve ANYTHING beyond being restored back into the family of the king and having a place at the king’s table?”

Mephibosheth has an abiding sense of his unworthiness. That understanding does not diminish his perception of grace. It enhances it. It makes grace larger. You and I are dead dogs. We are completely unworthy of God’s abiding presence and wonderful, matchless grace. And that sense of unworthiness isn’t supposed to remind us how awful and broken we are. It isn’t about a constant sense of “poor, pitiful, unfortunate me.” It exists to remind us of how God’s grace can cover over anyone’s brokenness. Because of God’s grace, even a dead dog can have its day.

All of us are dead dogs, just like Mephibosheth. And yet, through the grace of God we can be adopted into His family and be seated at His banquet. Because of the immense debt that God wiped away for us, we are to love his immensely. Jesus said it this way: “Those who have been forgiven much have loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.”

We are dead dogs because He paid a debt he did not owe, and I owed a debt I could not pay. It was not just an immense debt. It was an infinite debt. It extended beyond this life into the next. Never forget that we are deeply broken. Forgetting that deep brokenness gets us to a place where we assume that we deserve something better. A better life. A better house. A better marriage. A better college football team. We deserve to stay healthy and not get sick. This perspective of “deserving better” is not Biblical and it distorts us into spiritual weaklings.

We are dead dogs, as bad or in some cases worse than Mephibosheth. And we have been greatly and graciously loved. So much so that we have been placed regally and securely at the King’s banquet table.

Back to Heidi

About six months after that messy, rainy introduction, my dad was sitting in his chair (don’t all dads have a chair?). Sitting right next to him, cuddled up under his hand, was Good Heidi. She had, in time, grown to become fully devoted in love to my dad.

Your Heavenly Father has made it possible for a mangy, nasty, broken mess like you and like me to sit in His presence, safely in the protection of his gracious, righteous hand. Won't you become an object of his grace and love today?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT:

Tell us about your pets if you have any. What about growing up? Did you have pets? Did you see them express affection toward you?

Have you had moments or seasons in your life in which you felt insignificant, broken, sad, pitiable? What was that like for you?

How can the concept of spiritual “adoption,” God allowing you to be a part of His family, change those feelings of unworthiness?

Mephibosheth had a terrible life, much of his hardship beyond his control. He wasn't one who had to always deal with the consequences of poor decisions. Rather, he was dropped as a baby and the man who was tasked with taking care of him, took advantage of his infirmity. When you feel victimized like that, do you respond like Mephibosheth did, with humility and gratitude? If not, how do you respond?

In Luke 7:36-50, Jesus is at a Pharisee's home when a notorious woman came and washed his feet with her tears, kissing his feet and anointing them with perfume from an alabaster jar. The Pharisee scoffed at this and Jesus pointed out to those gathered that people who've been forgiven much, love much. They express their love through sacrificial ways. The one who has forgiven little, loves little. Explain that idea. Why does someone who has been forgiven much, love much?

How do you explain grace to someone who is not spiritually inclined?