

AT THE TABLE WITH JESUS
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We are in a series titled: Thin Spaces, Encountering Glory!

The purpose of this series is for us to become witnesses to the spaces in history where God has come close, where the immortal has ripped a hole in the veil that shrouds the mortal from the Divine and has allowed his glory to come close.

In each and every God-encounter we have seen the meekness, beauty and radical love of God.

At each encounter we have had the opportunity to fall in love with a beauty so captivating and a love so vast that it overwhelms comprehension.

This series of messages has also invited us to consider how we might build an expectation that God would come close and we would encounter his glory in similar spaces.

Since coming to FOL, I have been intrigued by how much our congregation holds Family Camp as the highlight of its life together. Members talk about going up the mountain to meet with God. There is a lot of expectation around meeting God in that place. Expectation is another word for faith. FOL puts a lot of faith in the idea that God will meet them at Family Camp. As a result, many people are met in unique ways each year.

I wonder what it would be like if we placed as much expectation, as much hope, as much faith that we would be met by God in profound and transformational ways as a community and as an individual when,

- Like Moses we create rhythms and spiritual practices of seeking the face of God daily at our own tent of meeting.
- Like Abel we offer the vocational work of our hands to God.
- Like Moses we come to God in the spaces where hope is deferred and we experience deep disappointment.
- Like Hagar we experience brokenness in our social systems.
- Like Leah we experience brokenness in our family systems
- Like Hannah we experience brokenness in our worship system.
- Like Abigail we meekly offer a pathway of reconciliation and restoration to God.

Encountering the glory of God can also occur when what seems like the most mundane of spaces—the table of fellowship becomes a thin space.

Today we are going to reflect around the strange encounter between David and Mephibosheth. This is an encounter that drags the future into the present tense, an encounter that is all wrapped up in glory because it tells the story of a future king and a future kingdom. This is also an encounter that sets the table for all future tables where Jesus joins us.

Let us pray together.

Hear our prayer, O LORD, and give ear to our cry; hold not your peace. Break through the thick veil of our own lack of faith, our own lack of vision, our own lack of longing, our own lack of imagination, our own apathy, our own weariness, our own mortality. We are but sojourners with you, guests on this earth like all our mothers and fathers who went before us. Hear us for the sake of your son Jesus, hear us and do not depart, hear us and by your Holy Spirit open the heavy eyelids that shroud our hearts from seeing you in this thin space of worship. Increase our faith in this hour. Amen

Nayelli read the account of David and Mephibosheth for us this morning. When we meet David in this telling of his life he is in a very different place than when we encountered him last week. David is no longer being chased across the backside of the wilderness by King Saul. David spent about 10 years running and hiding from Saul's insane desire to murder him. Saul is dead, and his oldest son and heir—Jonathan is also dead and David is now king. The biblical record explains, *"David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. ⁵ At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years."*

David has now conquered all of the neighbors of Israel who had chosen to be enemies. He has placed garrisons in their former lands as outposts to keep his nation safe and free. The nation of Israel for the first time in 7 ½ years is at peace.

The scriptures tell us, "So David reigned over all Israel. And David administered justice and equity to all his people"

David is now at home on his throne rather than out in the battle fields. Remember David is before anything else a warrior king. When you think of David as an adult, he is not a shepherd king playing a harp in a gentle pastoral setting. David is a man of blood. Remember God's words to David when he wanted to build a temple for the Lord, "But God said to me, 'You may not build a house for my name, for you are a man of war and have shed blood.'"

David the warrior king is living at peace in his palace and he has the leisure to remember his past, including the covenant he made with Jonathan about 10 to 15 years previously with his friend. "May the LORD be with you, as he has been with my father. ¹⁴ If I am still alive, show me the steadfast love of the LORD, that I may not die; ¹⁵ 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." ¹⁶ And Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the LORD take vengeance on David's enemies." ¹⁷ And Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him, for he loved him as he loved his own soul."

The word love or steadfast love in this text is the word *hesed* that we have discussed in previous talks. This is the word that God uses when he makes a covenant with his people it is the *hesed* of God or the steadfast love of God that is the source of all covenants and agreements between God and the human race, both in the ancient times of David and Mephibosheth and in our own day. The *hesed* love of God is the basis for our whole faith. We believe that God has steadfast love.

And, if you recall that love is the active love of God, the kindness of God, the love that works on behalf of the beloved.

David desires to keep his word to Jonathan. So, he inquires as to whether there are any of Saul's family still alive. He adds that he wants to show kindness to them for the sake of Jonathan. The word kindness in the text is *hesed*—

David is remembering his covenant. It was a covenant based on *hesed*.

David's servants at this point may have been suspecting that David wanted to discover former family members of Saul so that he could kill them. They know of David's ten-year wilderness wanderings where Saul chased him like a common criminal and made him dwell with his family in caves and in rough habitations in the open—laying on the ground and in the most base of circumstances. They also knew of his 7-year war with the house of Saul when Ishbosheth the son of Saul took the throne of Israel and fought with David. There would be very good reason to believe that David would seek to kill any remaining member of such a household. Politically it is not safe for David for them to remain alive—because they could covertly rally an army and cause an insurrection.

David's servants tell him that there is a son of Jonathan remaining—his name is Mephibosheth.

The scriptures introduce Mephibosheth to us in this way, “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.”

David sends to fetch Mephibosheth.

When Mephibosheth arrives he falls on his face before David and pays homage to him.

You can imagine the fear in Mephibosheth—he has been living on the outskirts of Israel in terror for his life. He has remained hidden and now the new king—the enemy of his family has found him and brought him before him.

How does David respond to Mephibosheth?

Hesed! Hesed! Hesed!

“Do not fear, for I will show you *HESED* 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.”

This is a shocking statement!

For the sake of your father, my friend, the one with whom I have a covenant, I will show you *hesed*—loving kindness. This gives David's enemy access to his heart, he sees Mephibosheth as he sees his beloved friend Jonathan.

I will restore to you all the land of Saul your father—this gives David’s enemy access to power - the means to gather an army to fight against David.

You shall eat at my table always—are you crazy David—you do not know what is in the heart of Mephibosheth—yet you give him physical access to your presence—to your table, to the space where only the closest and most trusted allies sit with a king.

David gives access to his heart, his power and his presence!

Do you see the beauty of such a king—inviting his enemy, his enemy to share his heart, his power and his presence.

Mephibosheth says to David,

“What is your servant, that you should show regard for a dead dog such as I?”

Mephibosheth is absolutely right. He is in the presence of a warrior king, a warrior with absolute authority in his kingdom. A warrior who has been either fighting or running in the wilds for at least 17 years. Just the presence of such a king would be foreboding—never mind hearing of his exploits.

Yet the text says this: “So Mephibosheth ate at David's table, **like one of the king's sons.**”

Mephibosheth the beloved

So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, for he ate always at the king's table.

Mephibosheth the beloved forever.

And then this strange final statement “he was lame in both feet”

Why this crazy statement at this point in the text?

Is this an afterthought?

No it is the pinnacle of the whole narrative.

Mephibosheth will always be lame. He will have no value or use to David. He cannot fight with David; he cannot defend David’s house.

He has to be brought to David; he cannot come himself.

Mephibosheth is not chosen to sit at the table of David for any reason but the hesed of David.

This is the writer’s point.

Yet Mephibosheth sits at the table of the king.

And it is in this realization that the meaning of Mephibosheth's name becomes so all important.

The Name Mephibosheth means remover of shame, dispeller of shame.

When we read the story of Mephibosheth we come to understand how shame is removed, how our shame is removed.

The glory of God comes close in this moment, right now when we realize that the story of Mephibosheth is a parable of God's relationship with us. It is a visual representation of who we are, who God is and how we are related to God.

Think of the sequence of events!

1. Saul is an enemy of David—by his own choice, not by the choice of David
The human race chose to be the enemy of God
“The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God”

“And you who once were alienated and hostile in mind doing evil deeds”

Alienated = ap-al-lot-ree-o'-o meaning to be shut out from fellowship and intimacy.

2. David & Jonathan have a covenant of hesed

Mephibosheth is not brought before the king because of any good thing, good desire, good work, in himself. He is brought to the table of the king because of a covenant between two people—he is not part of the covenant, he is the recipient of the love of that covenant and the love that covenant brings to him.

Hebrews 6-8 explains that the covenant is made between God the Father and God the Son. God will give a people to his Son.

The Son will pay the penalty their sins deserve, so they can become the beloved sons and daughters of God.

There is no work on behalf of the human race.

We are lame in both feet.

Our shame is removed in Jesus Christ

We are received in the presence of God because of an agreement between Father and Son.

Ours is but to receive and believe by faith.

3. Just as David searched the kingdom for Mephibosheth, so Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. We were not seeking after God, but he came seeking us.

“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God.” Romans 3:21

4. David brings Mephibosheth home

We have come home to God:

“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, ²³ and to the assembly^[a] of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”

5. Jesus offers us access to his heart

He invites us to become one with Him and one with the Father:

I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

6. Jesus offers us access to his power

Listen to the words of the apostle Paul,
having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead

7. Jesus offers us access to his presence

“I will be with you always to the end of the age”

8. We sit at the king's table like a son who inherits the kingdom

“Fear no, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Luke 12:32

9. We sit at the king’s table forever

“And the angel said to me, Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”

10 We, like Mephibosheth are lame

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Do you taste the beauty?

An enemy of God sought after by the King, brought into his presence, given access to the heart, the power and the presence of God. Forever more to sit as children, inheritors of the King—at his table!

Glory to God in the highest!

We sit at the table of Jesus now and we shall forever more.

The glory of God is encountered not only in the story of salvation that brings us near to God.

The Glory of God is often encountered at a table, around a meal.

Jesus sat at table with sinners—he was called friend of sinners!

He was criticized and mocked for his presence there!

- Jesus sat at table with followers.
- Jesus sat at table with crowds.
- Jesus sat at table with outcasts.
- Jesus sat at table with friends.

Who do we sit at table with, and do we invite Jesus to our table?

Friends, families, we find ourselves living in a time when the common meal has been pushed to the sidelines. The common meal is probably *the* primary way by which we take care of our physical need for food and our social need for conversation and intimacy and our cultural need to carry on traditions and convey values. The meal—preparation, serving, eating, cleaning up—has always been a microcosm of the intricate realities that combine to make up even the simplest life of men, women, and children. Because it is so inclusive (anyone and everyone can be included in the meal) and because it is so comprehensive (taking in the entire range of our existence—physical, social, cultural), the meal is about giving and receiving, knowing and being known.

And always, deeply embedded in the common meal—sometimes it's invisible, and we don't see it—is the experience of sacrifice: one life given so that another may live. It may be the life of a carrot or a cucumber or a fish or a duck or a lamb or a heifer, but it's life. Eating a meal involves us in a complex, sacrificial world of giving and receiving. Life feeds life. We are not self-sufficient. We live by life, and life is given to us.

The prominence of these meals keeps us in intimate touch with our families and our traditions in which we are reared, personally available to friends and guests, morally related to the hungry, and, perhaps most of all, participants in the context and conditions in which Jesus lived his life, using the table as he did—to make his enemies friends, to make strangers friends, to invite disciples into intimacy and to invite intimate friends into more: more of God, more of life, more of freedom and more of sacrifice.

Sadly—many families have allowed the busyness of life to be the weeds and thorns that choke out the seed that is the table of meeting—not only with each other but also with God.

The table is central to our identity and to where we form our identity.

For many of us—technology has separated us. The table is rarely a place where we all sit to commune with each other. In losing the table we have lost ourselves, we have lost our life together and we have lost the Presence of Jesus pervading our homes.

In the past, the Church has a rich history of sitting at table either in morning or evening—opening the word and reading and praying, inviting Jesus and his word into our mundane table life. Discussing the Word and being in the word were the regular rhythms, not the unusual rhythms of life.

Sadly—this loss of the table as a central place for family being present with Jesus and each other has leaked into how we see our mission in the world.

What is the goal of our vocation? What is the goal of our work in the city? What is the goal of our neighboring? What does incarnational presence actually mean.

Yes, it means working for justice in the systems of this world? Yes it means feeding the poor, educating the poor, making cultural norms of language and custom accessible to immigrants. Without this we would not be the people of God.

But this is the minimal goal, the minimal commitment and frankly the minimal cost.

The ultimate goal is to see people at the table of Jesus.

The table of Jesus is your table, the table of Jesus is my table.

The table of Jesus—where his love, his power and his presence are accessible is your table!

We need rhythms of inviting people to our table if we are to see enemies become friends of Jesus and strangers become intimates with our Lord.

This sort of ministry will cost you your life—not a few hours in a week, not a few dollars in online giving.

This ministry will cost you your life!

It will mean that our rhythms of how we sit at the table as individuals, couples and families, needs to change.

It will mean that our rhythms of who we invite to our table—will need to change.

Think of the joy of Mephibosheth as he was brought from fear, hiding and shame. What good in his life would he have traded for time at the table of the King.

A final reading:

“When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

What is our motivation to make our mundane table of eating the table of the Lord by inviting and acknowledging his presence, delighting in his love and relying on his power?

What is our motivation to make our mundane table the table where enemies and strangers feel welcome?

This is—the table of the Lord!

The table where the lame have been invited. The table where all, all, all fear and shame are removed. The table where there is thick presence, the table where there is access to power to live this life and the table where there is love enough for ever

Jesus has left us this, his table—to remind us of what we might do with ours!