

The Merciful Monarch
2 Samuel 9
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Meh FIB oh sheth. Mephibosheth. I have been practicing saying that lately.

Folks, today's journey through 2 Samuel brings us to chapter 9, which gives us the account of Mephibosheth (page 260).

I remember hearing this story as a kid in Sunday School class, but frankly I don't think I have even mentioned it in a sermon during the thirty-five years I have been a pastor – partly because I found it so hard to pronounce Mephibosheth.

Well, today we will explore this story in some detail, and we will hear some very important words the Lord has for us. Let's pause and pray he would enable us to understand, believe and obey this truth.

Saul had been king, the first king of Israel for over forty years from about 1052-1010 B.C. When he dies, David, the man God chose as the next ruler of Israel, is recognized as king by just the tribe of Judah. The other eleven tribes of Israel choose Saul's son Ishbosheth as their king, though Abner, Saul's general, is really the power behind the throne.

After seven years, that all crumbles. Abner shifts his loyalty to David. Both he and Ishbosheth are assassinated, and all twelve tribes acknowledge David as their king. He moves his capitol to Jerusalem and rules for the next thirty-three years. His kingdom enjoys both peace and prosperity, and it is very much the golden age for the nation of Israel. A few years (probably 5-10) after he had become king over the entire nation.....

2 Samuel 9:1 – David asked, “Is there anyone remaining from the family of Saul I can show kindness to for Jonathan’s sake?”

Jonathan was Saul's son and David's best friend. Even during the ten-year period when David was in exile because Saul was trying to kill him, their friendship stayed intact. Jonathan, however, continued to serve his father and was killed on the battlefield at the same time Saul was. David has wonderful memories of Jonathan and asks the

advisers in his court if anyone from Saul's family is still alive.

A man named Ziba, who had been one of Saul's chief servants, is summoned. David asks him about any survivors in Saul's family:

2 Samuel 9:3b – Ziba said to the king, “There is still Jonathan’s son who was injured in both feet.”

We were actually introduced to this individual in:

2 Samuel 4:4 – Jonathan had a son whose feet were crippled. He was five years old when the report about the deaths of Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel. His nanny picked him up and fled, but as she was hurrying to flee, he fell and became lame. His name was Mephibosheth.

Back to chapter 9. David learns where Mephibosheth is and has him brought to the palace.

2 Samuel 9:6 – Mephibosheth son of Jonathan son of Saul came to David, fell facedown, and paid homage. David said, “Mephibosheth!” “I am your servant,” he replied.

Remember, this is a member of the house of Saul. He could have easily thought of himself as the rightful ruler of Israel. Yet, like his father Jonathan, he acknowledges David as the true king.

Jonathan knew the Lord had chosen David for the throne. Perhaps Mephibosheth did as well. Michal, who is both David's wife and Saul's daughter, seems bitter that her father's house has fallen. Mephibosheth doesn't appear to have that problem.

It was certainly plausible that some people might attempt to restore the house of Saul by trying to put his grandson on the throne. In the ancient world, it would never have seemed strange at all if, after discovering Saul's grandson was still alive, David would have had him imprisoned or even exiled. But that is not David's response:

2 Samuel 9:7 – “Don’t be afraid,” David said to him, “since I intend to show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all your grandfather Saul’s fields, and you will always eat meals at my table.”

Even though Jonathan has been dead for a number of years, **David** has not forgotten the deep friendship they enjoyed. **He makes two promises. The first is making sure Mephibosheth gets the property rightly belonging to him.** For some reason, he doesn’t have it.

The text indicates Ziba, Saul’s former servant, is quite wealthy. He has a staff of twenty servants plus fifteen sons. It is very possible that Ziba was acting as Saul’s heir and denied Mephibosheth what should have been his inheritance.

Anyway, David corrects any injustice and assigns Ziba, his sons and his servants to all work on Mephibosheth’s behalf. Ziba may not be excited about this, but feels compelled to follow David’s orders.

2 Samuel 9:11-12b – Ziba said to the king, “Your servant will do all my lord the king commands.” All those living in Ziba’s house were Mephibosheth’s servants.

The second promise David made was that Mephibosheth would “always eat at my table.”

In other words, David would treat Mephibosheth as a member of his own family, as his own son. And that is what happens:

2 Samuel 9:11b – So Mephibosheth ate at David’s table just like one of the king’s sons.

In fact, the author’s closing summary is this:

2 Samuel 9:13 – However, Mephibosheth, whose feet had been injured, lived in Jerusalem because he always ate at the king’s table.

Okay, that is our text this morning. It’s a great story, one you can tell your kids, as long as you can pronounce “Mephibosheth.” Or maybe you can just call him “Mef.”

Yet, this is more than a nice story. God, the true and living God, the Triune God who created and rules the universe, has something to say to us, to you, through these words this morning. I want to highlight two important lessons we should heed and hear:

#1 Like Mephibosheth, we need to humbly receive the King’s mercy and grace.

Folks, this story provides a beautiful illustration of our relationship with the Lord Jesus, the King of kings. Friends, I am convinced God intends to use much of what we read in 2 Samuel to point us to Jesus. It contains what are sometimes called Bible types or typology, where people or events in the Old Testament symbolize people or events in the New Testament.

It is clear that David, the anointed king, the messiah king, is a type or symbol of Jesus, the true and ultimate Messiah King. There are many things David does which point to what Jesus will do, and there are things David fails to do, which reminds us that even though a king is cool, The King, Jesus, is far cooler.

Friends, what David does for Mephibosheth symbolizes in at least three ways what the Lord Jesus does for us:

First are the words David speaks in verse 7, “Do not be afraid.”

As we noted, there were certainly reasons why Mephibosheth might be afraid of the king. Yet, David assures him that for the sake of Jonathan, he will show him only kindness.

Now the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, does talk about fearing the Lord. And yes, we should be very afraid to try to live apart from him. **Yet, as New Covenant believers, we do not have to be afraid of God.**

When the angels appeared to the shepherds that first Christmas night, their message was, **“Do not be afraid.”** Numerous times in the gospels, Jesus tells his disciples, **“Do not be afraid.”** The writer of Hebrews tells us that because Jesus is our High Priest, because we approach God in Jesus’ name and for his sake, **we don’t have to be afraid:**

Hebrews 4:16 – Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need.

The Apostle John says:

1 John 4:18 – Such love (God’s love) has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love.

Now, if someone is not a believer in Jesus, there is plenty of reason to be afraid of God. The prospect of experiencing his wrath is the most terrifying thing anyone can imagine.

But, friend, if you are a Christian, if Jesus Christ is your Savior, you don’t ever have to be afraid of God. I know pastors and parents sometimes try to “put the fear of the Lord” in us to discourage bad behaviors. What they say may not be completely wrong, but it is likely, very incomplete.

Perfect love expels fear. Through the cross of Jesus Christ, we see God’s perfect love. There, Jesus bore the punishment for our sins, so that we would never have to experience God’s wrath. For the sake of Jesus, God’s eternal Son, the Father will show us his kindness. Don’t be afraid of him.

Second, David, (also in verse 7), invites Mephibosheth to eat at his table and to do so on a daily basis.

Folks, 3,000 years ago, eating a meal with someone was a symbol of true friendship. The same is true today. Who do you invite over for dinner or go out to lunch with? People you like. Oh yes, you may end up in a business luncheon with someone of whom you are not very fond, but that is not what happens here.

David wants Mephibosheth at his table. He wants to spend time with him. I suspect this is because Mephibosheth reminds David of Jonathan. He had never had another friend like Jonathan. Those types of relationships don’t come around very often. Especially as a king, I suspect normal friendships were not easy to find. Perhaps David thought Mephibosheth could provide that.

Folks, this is a reminder that the Lord doesn’t just tolerate us. He wants to establish a relationship, a close friendship with us. **He even invites us to his table, the Lord’s Table, where we are reminded of his love and reminded of what he did for us through his death and resurrection. We call that Communion or the Lord’s Supper. The King of kings invites you and me to his table and extends to us his friendship. Wow!**

Now, being a friend of the king is probably a little different than some other friendships. There is a certain respect required as we relate to the king, even if he is our friend.

When I am with my closest friends, we often spend a bit of time teasing each other. I think the teasing is a reminder that even though we recognize each other’s flaws, we still care about and trust each other.

Though it may have been appropriate for Mephibosheth to tease David, I cannot imagine that I would tease the Lord Jesus. After all, he has no flaws about which he can be teased. Jesus could certainly tease me about plenty of things, but it would be a one-way street.

Yet, I have found that the best times in my friendships are when the teasing stops and we start talking about the deeper things in our lives. **Our hurts and hopes, our fears and our dreams. That is what close, intimate friendships are about. That is the type of friendship Jesus offers when he invites us to his table.**

Third, David promises to treat Mephibosheth as his own son.

2 Samuel 9:11b – So Mephibosheth ate at David’s table just like one of the king’s sons.

It is interesting, Mephibosheth becomes like one of David’s sons, but he would never have been able to be one of David’s servants. Twice, the text reminds us Mephibosheth is crippled – probably not able to walk – or if he could, it was only with great effort.

In this agricultural society, it was difficult for Mephibosheth to even survive. He could not take care of his own land. He had little to offer David, little he could do to serve him. All he could do was

humbly and gratefully receive the grace the king provides.

Friend, I hope you see the rather obvious parallel with our situation as believers in Jesus. It is pretty much a one-way street. It is not about anything we have to offer Jesus, but about what he gives us.

Remember, folks – and this is one of our frequent themes here at CBC – it is not about what we do for the Lord, but about what he has done, is doing, and will do for us.

Friends, we are spiritual cripples. Only with the help of His Spirit are we able to accomplish anything which is truly good. And even then, we could never, ever earn God's favor or repay what we have received.

He chooses to treat us as his children, to call us his sons and daughters, to actually adopt us into his family, not because we have earned that right, but because of his grace.

1 John 3:1 – See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are.

So friends, like David with Mephibosheth, but only better – the Lord assures us we don't need to be afraid. He offers us his friendship. And he promises to treat us as his own child.

Our response, like Mephibosheth, should be to humbly and gratefully receive the King's mercy and grace.

Friend, I hope you are doing that. I hope that by grace, through faith, you have received the Lord Jesus as your Savior. If not, today is a great time to do that. As the Lord enables, you need to turn and put your trust in him. If you have not done that or are not sure what that means, please talk to me after the service.

Second, like David, we need to show grace and mercy to Mephibosheths.

Now, I suspect, like me, you don't know anybody named Mephibosheth. But, we probably know some people with disabilities. As a Christian, a believer in Jesus, we ought to show kindness and mercy to those folks.

Now, over the past 50+ years, our society has made great improvements in how we treat people with special needs. That includes those with physical, intellectual or emotional issues. Here on the Iron Range, we are fortunate to have the Range Center, NHS and others which provide outstanding assistance and care for those with physical and intellectual disabilities.

Frankly, our society as a whole, struggles to know how to best deal with and help those with mental/emotional health problems. Anyway, here are some specific things I think the Lord wants us to learn from David's example:

First, we should serve family members and friends who have passed away.

That maybe sounds weird, but let me explain. David's kindness toward Mephibosheth was motivated partly by his loyalty to and love for Jonathan. Even though his friend had been dead for about fifteen years, David wanted to serve Jonathan by helping his survivors.

Friends, it seems this used to be more common in our society. When a man died, for example, his brother or a good friend would often provide financial support for that widow and her children.

Now, for a variety of reasons, we tend to more quickly forget those who have died. Some churches have "godparents" who are specifically responsible to help a child – especially to provide spiritual guidance if a parent dies.

In our church, we view that as the role of the entire congregation – though it is always helpful if particular individuals commit to assuming that responsibility.

I guess the broader point is that as Christians, we should be committed to caring for one another, not because the government mandates or facilitates that, but because we are seeking to follow the Lord Jesus' command to love one another, not just with words, but in deed and truth.

Second, we should work to make sure people are treated fairly and justly.

David intervened to make sure Mephibosheth got the property that rightly belonged to him after

Ziba had apparently been using it as his own. Now, because we are not a king like David, it is more difficult for us to right wrongs. However, we can certainly be an advocate for someone who is vulnerable. This may involve making phone calls, filling out paperwork, providing transportation or whatever else we can do to try to insure someone is being treated fairly by “the system” or whoever happens to be in charge.

Part of the lesson is that God calls us to have more than nice, compassionate feelings toward those less fortunate than we are. He wants us to have a real love that leads to actions on behalf of other people. And he doesn't want us to be doing this in order to get a pat on the back or accolades from other people.

I am grateful that a number of you in this congregation give significant time and energy to helping others who are less fortunate. For example, various people in our congregation are actively serving with the Chisholm Food Shelf – seeking to help folks in our community who lack basic resources. As a church, we want to be known for our love for Jesus, our faithfulness to His Word, and for caring about and helping other people – especially those in need.

Third, we should befriend people with special needs.

A big part of caring about and helping these folks is to be their friend. David made Mephibosheth a regular guest at his table. That reflected a friendship between the king of Israel and a man who could not walk.

Being a friend with someone with a disability really is no different than being a friend with anyone else. Spending time with each other, talking with that person, enjoying life together. That is what friendships are about.

And folks, these friendships are not one-way streets. You may think you are spending time with someone just to help that person out; but likely, you will find that you benefit from that relationship as well.

Sometimes those with limited physical and intellectual abilities are very gifted when it comes to showing love. Being on the receiving end of that love can be a great blessing. One of the most

loving people in our congregation is Ellie Forsline, a 12-year old girl who has Downs Syndrome. If you know Ellie, I suspect your life is a little richer than it would be if you didn't.

Yet, as we think and talk about showing grace and mercy to Mephibosheths, it is important to remember that our ability to do this depends on our experience of God's grace and mercy. People can fall into all sorts of ditches if they strive to serve those who are less fortunate without first experiencing God's grace and mercy.

Some people think their kindness toward others will somehow earn them God's favor. Others become discouraged because the people they serve don't always seem to appreciate it. Some become very judgmental of others who don't seem to have the same concern for people with special needs as they do.

Friend, when we try to serve in the flesh, relying on our own strength, our soul often becomes more empty, and we will frequently be frustrated. When we serve in the Spirit, relying on the Lord's strength, it tends to fill our soul, and our joy is often increased. It is because we have experienced God's love through Jesus that we are able to love one another – including Mephibosheths around us.