

Loved by the King

2 Samuel 9:1-13

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I have learned that people learn best through examples. When my wife and I worked with people who could not read and write, we were forced to think deeply about how to communicate the profound truths of God's word to people who never had attended a day of school. How do you teach what justification, sanctification, adoption, propitiation, election, or atonement mean to people who cannot read? What I have learned is that God is an amazing teacher. He has already given examples of these things in scripture. We understand the stories, and we will understand the words. Today, I want to use a narrative from 2 Samuel 9 to teach the love of God through story. Though this story is 3,000 years old, it is about you and I as much as the people who are in it. We can see at least three snapshots of God and us:

1. The Love of the King (v. 1-5).
2. Fear and shame before the King (v. 6-8).
3. Restored and adopted by the King (v. 9-13).

1. The Love of the King

And David said, "Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" ² Now 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." ³ 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." ⁴ 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." ⁵ Then King David sent and brought him from the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar. (2 Samuel 9:1-5)

The Bible is a big book filled with wonderful and tragic stories. I want to share one of the lesser-known stories with you today. It is about love. To really understand it, you need to understand the background. If you just read this narrative without background, you will miss a lot. It would be like watching the last episode in a TV series and trying to make sense of it. There are four main people

mentioned in this narrative: David, Jonathan, Mephibosheth, and Saul. Saul was the first King of Israel. In the beginning, he rescued Israel from her enemies and was loved by most Israelites. Over time, and through a series of bad decisions by Saul, God decided to remove him from being king. Samuel, the prophet, said, *"You have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel"* (1 Samuel 15:26b). God sent Samuel to anoint David, who was then only a teenager, to become the next king of Israel. Next, David killed Goliath, gaining honor and fame and even winning the heart of Jonathan. David became Jonathan's best friend. The Bible says, *"The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul"* (1 Samuel 18:1). But it was not only Jonathan, the son of Saul, who honored David. David was a great warrior, and the people began to cheer, *"Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands."* Saul began to be very jealous of David. He tried to kill him by sending David to kill a certain number of Philistines just to be able to marry Saul's daughter. David did it and did not die. This made Saul even more scared because he could see God was with David. Saul threw spears at him. Saul did these things even though David was his own son-in-law. Jonathan helped David to escape and made a covenant with him. Jonathan told him:

"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." (1 Samuel 20:13-17)

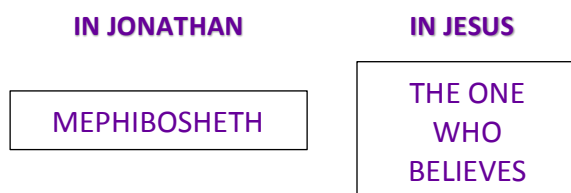
David never forgot that oath. He ran for many years to escape from Saul as he repeatedly tried to kill him. On several occasions, the army of Saul almost caught David. David had two chances to kill Saul, but he would not. Then after many years, Saul and Jonathan were killed in battle, and David became king. First, he was King of Judah, his own tribe, and then he was King of all Israel. When his kingdom was at peace, he decided to keep his covenant oath to Jonathan. David says at the start of our passage today, *"Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?"* The word translated "kindness" here is the Hebrew word *hesed*. *Hesed* is very difficult to explain, as we do not have the exact same idea or word in European languages. All throughout the Old Testament, this word is translated, faithfulness, steadfast love, loving-kindness, mercy, grace, and kindness. It refers to the love, grace, faithfulness, and kindness that result from a covenant. What does that mean? In our day we have contracts between people. We also have familial, emotional, or romantic love. *Hesed* is the faithfulness people have to a contract, combined with the love of a friend or spouse. When a couple makes their marriage vows, they demonstrate the closest thing to *hesed* that we have. Listen to the most common wedding vows:

"I, _____, take you, _____, to be my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy law, in the presence of God I make this vow."

Hesed is the love that drives us to make extravagant promises. All of these marriage promises are unconditional: for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health. It is *hesed* that drives David. He remembers the covenant. He loved Jonathan as the best of friends. What David asks his court is, *"Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness (HESED) for*

Jonathan's sake?" At this point, you may be thinking, "what does the love of a middle eastern king who lived 3,000 years ago have to do with me in Madrid in these modern days?" That is a good question, and here is my answer: The way that David loved Mephibosheth on Jonathan's account is the way God the Father loves us on Jesus' account. Stop and think about what I just said. Here is another way of saying the same thing: David loved Mephibosheth in Jonathan. David made a covenant promise to be kind to the house of Jonathan. Now he seeks out someone in Jonathan's line to be kind to. If you believe in Jesus, you are in Christ. God loves you in Jesus. On the cross, God made a covenant. It is what we celebrate every time we do the Lord's Supper. The New Testament has over 70 references to Christians being "in Christ".

Jonathan's son named Mephibosheth was loved in the person of Jonathan. You and I are loved in Christ.



We do not know much about Mephibosheth, but what we can be sure of is this: David's love for Mephibosheth had nothing to do with Mephibosheth. I repeat, it had nothing to do with how desirable Mephibosheth was. In the same way, God's love for you has nothing to do with you. That may sound strange to you, but it is true. You are loved by God, the king, because of Jesus. That is what makes the love of God so incredible in Christ. Let's take a moment and try and see the narrative from Mephibosheth's perspective, because we are more like Mephibosheth than David.

2. Fear and shame before the King

⁶ And 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." ⁷ And 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." ⁸ And he paid homage and said, "What is your servant, that you should show regard for a dead dog such as I?" (2 Samuel 9:6-8)

Mephibosheth must have been terrified. Mephibosheth was Saul's grandson. He was from the other king's family. Mephibosheth knew that Saul had tried to kill David many times. Could you imagine how he felt when he heard that King David wanted to see him? Mephibosheth must have been panicked. Do you know what the winning kings did to the other king's family when they took power? They commonly killed all the heirs that could oppose them. Mephibosheth probably thought his day to die had come. Could you imagine how Mephibosheth felt on the long journey to Jerusalem? I would guess that he had kissed his wife and son goodbye. He must have thought that he might not ever see them again. Have you ever feared for your life? It is an experience that you will never forget. What he was feeling must be what it will feel like when we die. How do you feel when you think about meeting the Holy God face to face? What is going to happen to you? So, there is part of

this meeting that is fear. But there is more. Remember, Mephibosheth was handicapped. 2 Samuel 4:4 tells the narrative of him as a child:

⁴ 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.

Maybe he had broken his ankles or legs in the fall trying to escape, and they did not heal correctly. Now imagine again that you are Mephibosheth. Most ancient cultures did not view handicapped people as a good thing. Mephibosheth most likely felt ashamed for his disability in his culture, because people would say that God had punished him. One repeated comment from people with visible disabilities is that people see your disability before they see you. Sometimes ancient people were cruel. God had to give the Israelites laws concerning the just treatment of handicapped people. Leviticus 19:14: ***“You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the Lord.”***

You would think that these kinds of laws were not needed, but they were. If you were a crippled son of an enemy, you would not expect to be treated kindly because you were handicapped. As a matter of fact, he probably felt shame for being broken. Have you ever been ashamed of what you cannot change? Maybe the way you look? It could be something you were born with, or that happened to you. It might be something you said or did that you are ashamed of. Maybe it is something that someone did to you. Some people who have been abused feel shame for what was done to them. They live in constant shame, and many abused people speak of feeling like everyone can see their shame.

Please listen to me. I want you to think God’s thoughts. First, God does not want you to waste time and energy on what you cannot change. God wants us to focus on him and what we can change. Second, you are never alone in being weak or crippled. One quote on social media says, *“I cannot walk; what is your disability?”* What does that mean? It means that just because you can’t see where a person is crippled, does not mean that they are whole. There is not a person on earth who is not crippled in some way. We all have a twisted nature. Every one of us has crippled desires. They are shameful, sinful thoughts. We want more money than we need. We want to be better than others. We desire sex that God says is a sin. We are jealous, fearful, broken people. We are cowards and choose to ignore evil. We want to be loved so badly that we seek out love. In the wrong places. In God’s eyes, we have all fallen off our horses. We are cripples. To be a sinner is to be crippled. We are sinners by nature and by choice. When we die, we will feel like Mephibosheth felt. It will be terror and shame to stand before the king. We will fall on our face in reverence. Everything hidden will be brought into the light. Then we shall see just how broken the world really was. He knows that we are broken, but he loves us anyway.

David did not love Mephibosheth because he was lovable. He loved him for Jonathan’s sake. God does not love Christians because of their lovability. He loves them in Christ. That is why nothing can separate us from the love of God. God’s love is tied to his perfectly lovable son Jesus first, and comes through Jesus to us by grace and faith in perfect strength and impossible to break. All the religious rituals cannot make you more loveable than you are in Christ. All the offerings and good works cannot make you more acceptable. All your striving cannot make you more righteous than you are in

Jesus. That is amazing, but here is where the narrative gets even more unbelievable. David does far more than just love Mephibosheth; he restores his honor and treats him like his own son.

3. Restored and adopted by the King

⁹ Then 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. ¹⁰ And 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. ¹¹ Then 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. ¹² And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Mica. And all who lived in Ziba's house became Mephibosheth's servants. ¹³ So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, for he ate always at the king's table. Now he was lame in both his feet. (Samuel 9:9-13)

Apparently, Ziba and his sons had taken possession of Saul's fields. It does not seem that they were not giving any of the produce from his family's land to Mephibosheth. David now does the unthinkable. He exalts and restores his enemy. He gives Mephibosheth his dignity back. Not only does he not get killed, he gets blessed. The narrative repeats three times that he ate at the table with David. In each mention, we learn something of the relationship:

- *"But Mephibosheth your master's grandson shall always eat at my table"* (v. 10). From this reference, it is David's intention that Mephibosheth be close to him and eat at his table.
- *"So Mephibosheth ate at David's table, like one of the king's sons"* (v. 11). Mephibosheth is "like" the sons of the king. He has a personal relationship with the king like one of the family.
- *"So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, for he ate always at the king's table. Now he was lame in both his feet"* (v. 13). The broken enemy is now living permanently with the king. He eats with him every meal. He is loved despite his brokenness.

Why does the text repeat this detail so much? It is because we are to see the amazing love and grace that is shown to Mephibosheth. What an amazing reversal of fortunes. Did you know that God can change a person's life totally? He can change anything. Nothing is impossible for God. No matter how broken or how much of an enemy of God's you are, he will love you in Christ. This combination of being honored and brought into the family is exactly what happens to us in the gospel. That is what salvation is all about. God blesses his enemies. Listen to the way Paul the Apostle speaks of God's love in Christ as he writes to the Ephesians these words:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making

known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.¹¹ In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:3)

Did you know that God can change a person's life totally? He can change anything. Nothing is impossible for God. No matter how broken or how much of an enemy of God's you are, he will love you in Christ. Here is how you can be in Christ. Hear the word of truth . . . believe in Jesus . . . you are in Christ.

Questions for reflection:

1. Can you tell the story in 2 Samuel 9:1-13? What happens first? Next?
2. How would you describe the love of David in this passage?
3. Why did he want to show kindness to the son of Jonathan?
4. What happened to Mephibosheth, why was he crippled?
5. After reading verses 6-8, how do you think Mephibosheth felt meeting David? What emotions did he have?
6. In what ways does David bless Mephibosheth?
7. How does David's love compare to the way God loves us?
8. What does it mean to be "in Christ"?