

Mephibosheth

“Mephibosheth bowed down and said, ‘What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?’ Then [David]...said...‘Mephibosheth, grandson of [Saul] will always eat at my table’ . . . And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king’s table, and he was crippled in both feet” (2 Samuel 9:8-12).

The Old Testament contains very many allusions, prophecies, types, and symbols that anticipate the great and wonderful thing that God will do when the Son comes to earth. The Incarnation and work of the Jewish Messiah is so exceedingly necessary to humanity, to God, indeed to the whole creation, that its coming is proleptically embedded throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. This episode in 2 Samuel 9 has to be one of the most precious examples of the grace that will be extended to us when Christ comes. If you haven’t read it lately, let’s look at it.

After David was anointed king and actually began to reign (2 Samuel 8:15), he remembered the kindness that Jonathan had shown him. Saul was dead. Saul’s son Jonathan was dead. So David inquired if there was anyone still alive from the house of Saul to whom David could show kindness. It turns out, there was, but he was a weak and flawed person: he was crippled in both feet. Jonathan had a son, Mephibosheth, who was being secluded and cared for in a certain town east of the Jordan river. This Mephibosheth was a nobody. Because of his deformity, he was no pretender for the throne, he was no brave warrior, he was not worthy of anyone’s attention or interest. He couldn’t even take care of himself. If anything, he lived in fear because, according to the way the world operates, when one dynasty replaced another, members of the replaced house were potentially at risk of being murdered.

So David called for crippled Mephibosheth. He probably came expecting to be executed. When he came, he bowed down before David (verse 6). Picture how exceedingly awkward that must have been! A disfigured man who is lame, deformed, who has no use of his lower extremities, *bowing down*. No Hollywood movie could possibly capture such a humiliating scene.

Let’s understand this: David owed Mephibosheth nothing. Mephibosheth deserved nothing. And Mephibosheth surely knew that. It would have been showing mercy if David had said, “I promise to protect you. You won’t suffer harm from me.” But that’s not what David said. David bestowed grace upon grace on Mephibosheth. **“‘Don’t be afraid,’ David said to him, ‘for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table’” (verse 7). “So Mephibosheth ate at David’s table like one of the king’s sons” (verse 11b).**

Mephibosheth’s response? One of abject humility. He referred to himself as a “dead dog” and as a “slave” to David (verse 8). He expected to be executed, but instead he received honor, wealth and dignity.

In verses 1, 3, and 7 of this chapter, three times, David says he wants to “show kindness.” That’s how the NIV translates the Hebrew. But the Hebrew word is not “show” but “do.” David wants to *do* kindness. Not just *be* kind, rather, *do* kindness. In Scripture, we are what we do. This is the point made in James Chapter 2, verses 14 to 26, where faith is doing. If we believe something, James argues, we have to do something about it. David isn’t just a kind person, he *does* kindness. God’s grace isn’t just a doctrine of the Church. God’s grace is God *doing* something great for those who don’t deserve anything.

The word “kindness” by the way, *chesed*, can be translated in many ways, including kindness, love, mercy, goodness and faithfulness. It’s the concept that the New Testament authors bring into their writings as “grace.” The word is used for relationships that are asymmetrical, where one person is

superior and the other is weak or in need of help of some kind, and natural circumstances would indicate that the aid isn't going to come. Think about what David did! He took a nobody, someone who was frail and weak, and gave him the inheritance of a king. He invited him to eat at his royal table as if he were an adopted son. David also commanded Saul's personal servant to be Mephibosheth's servant – as if Mephibosheth were a king! Mephibosheth isn't simply receiving privileges. This deformed nobody was lifted up to be someone really special in the kingdom, not for any inherent reason but only and entirely because of the kindness and goodness of David. David sought to bless this person, and he blessed him beyond anyone's wildest imagination.

David is doing more here than simply fulfilling the promises he made to Saul and to Jonathan (many places in 1 Samuel). He's not merely showing *chesed*, or covenant faithfulness – although he surely is doing that. It's that David is the ideal king (at least up to this point in the narrative, he is; Chapter 11 is coming). He's doing what a godly king is supposed to do, which is to reflect God's own Person (showing mercy and grace), and to bestow blessing to those under his rule. He's not a "taking" kind of king as most secular kings are, but he's a "giving" king. So, David here is even more than showing God's grace to Jonathan's (or Saul's) house. He's lavishing love on his subjects, seeking to benefit them to the maximum. David is the ideal king. He used his authority and power to bless others. Even those undeserving of blessing.

I cannot conceive of a more stunning picture of grace and of what Jesus, the ultimate and greatest descendent of David, accomplished for us than this episode in 2 Samuel. The Spirit of God so controlled the flow of history and the interaction of people that we have this anticipatory narrative precisely showing what God does for us, His beloved but fallen creatures. We're all Mephibosheths, deformed by sin and failure, deserving of nothing except to be executed. And yet, we receive everything! We get angels to serve us, more powerful than the servants that Mephibosheth got, and we get a future existence vastly superior to the pension Mephibosheth received. We get to eat at the heavenly table, in the majestic presence of the Creator and sovereign Ruler of the cosmos. It's as if we're adopted into God's own family. We get an inheritance and honor and dignity beyond our wildest dreams or imagination. God's extreme, profligate goodness and generosity are on vivid display in this precious Scripture text.

Jesus' mission to the world was one of "grace upon grace" so that we receive blessing from God's infinite fullness (John 1:16). Our election, our call to the Gospel, our regeneration, our justification, our adoption, the forgiveness of sins, our sanctification, our preservation, and our ultimate glorification – all this is by grace. So that **"in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus"** (Ephesians 2:7).

Now, let's try to imagine what this world will be like when the God of all grace sits on the throne of David. David's show of kindness was only a reflection of what God does, and that was amazing. When God himself comes back to rule from Jerusalem, grace will abound and abound and . . . it'll be absolutely glorious! I hope you're looking forward to it.

And finally, what is our response to grace? It should be exactly like that of Mephibosheth: "I'm your servant." Gratitude is as gratitude does. We *do* thanks. We express our thanks to Jesus for all that He did for us by serving Him according to His holy (and revealed) will. Every meal Mephibosheth ate from that day on reminded him of grace. May we too, unlovely nobodies that we are, be continually reminded, all thru the day, day after day, of God's extreme goodness to us. And may we show grace to others according to the same super-abundant measure as we've received it. Let's live lives of grace.