

The Kindness of the King

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[0 : 0 0] This morning's reading can be found on page 312 of your pew Bibles, 2 Samuel 9, David and Mephibosheth.

David asked, is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake? Now there was a servant of Saul's household named Zeba.

They summoned him to appear before David, and the king said to him, are you Zeba? At your service, he replied. The king asked, is there no one still alive from the house of Saul to whom I can show God's kindness?

Zeba answered the king, there is still a son of Jonathan. He is lame in both feet. Where is he? The king asked. Zeba answered, he is at the house of Machir, son of Amiel in Lodabar.

So King David had him brought from Lodabar, from the house of Machir, son of Amiel. When Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan, son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor.

[1 : 2 9] David said, Mephibosheth. At your service, he replied. 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. Mephibosheth bowed down and said, what is your servant that you should notice a dead dog like me?

Then the king summoned Zeba, Saul's steward, and said to him, I have given your master's grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family. You and your sons and your servants are to farm the land for him and bring in the crops, so that your master's grandson may be provided for.

And Mephibosheth, grandson of your master, will always eat at my table. Now Zeba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. Then Zeba said to the king, your servant will do whatever my lord the king commands his servant to do.

So Mephibosheth ate at David's table like one of the king's sons. Mephibosheth had a young son named Micah, and all the members of Zeba's household were servants of Mephibosheth.

[2 : 5 3] And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem because he always ate at the king's table. He was lame in both feet. This is the word of the Lord.

Thank you. Friends, good morning. It's great to be with you and a great privilege to open up God's word.

Let us pray as we come to 2 Samuel 9. Heavenly Father, we praise you for you are a God who speaks. And we thank you that you haven't left us by ourselves to work out who you are and what you've done for us, but you have given your word.

And so we pray that as we come to 2 Samuel 9 this morning, that you would speak to us. Mould us and shape us.

Refresh us. Encourage us. Comfort us. For Jesus' sake. Amen. A few years ago, I was at a Sunday lunch meeting after church.

[3 : 59] It was the team from my church who did welcoming at a particular service, who were gathering together to think about how they could do that task better. And you know how it is, these sort of days where everyone sort of has to scramble a little bit to make it work.

And so the family who hosted us, they had three kids under five. And then there was another family there and they had their two primary school-aged kids. And then there was another family and they had one in primary school and one in high school.

There was a few with no kids, but it was sort of just everyone in the house together, the scramble after church, a little bit of chaos. And so we had lunch together and that was wonderful, a little bit chaotic.

And then we sent the kids out to the backyard to sort of run and play around while the parents talked about welcoming. And about 20 minutes into our conversation, we heard some crying coming from the backyard.

Now, for the parents in the room, you'll instinctively know that when that happens, your first thought is, please don't be my kid. But despite everyone longing or wanting to try and work out who it was, we couldn't identify whose cry it was.

[5 : 09] We couldn't work out where the crying was coming from. And so then people started second-guessing themselves. You know, wives started to turn to husbands and said, that's not one of ours, is it? And as we were trying to figure it out, there were some footsteps that we could hear coming from the back.

And so everyone sort of turned to the hallway where this mysterious figure would appear from. And the footsteps weren't walking, they were running. And the mystery figure revealed themselves.

And it was, to everyone's surprise, the 14-year-old boy who was crying. And he ran up to his mum and he came onto his mum's lap and he burrowed his head into her arm.

And he just sobbed. And he grazed his knee, obviously, and that day, with whatever he was dealing with, that was just too much for him. But there was mum, cradling her teenage boy in her arms.

Probably a mix of emotions going on for her. Part embarrassment for her son that he was still doing this as a 14-year-old. Part loving the fact that her boy still wanted to cuddle. But all of it infused with love and kindness to her son.

[6 : 23] And I think that is a picture of motherhood. When Eugene Peterson, the Christian author and pastor, wanted to come up with a definition of faithfulness, he actually redeems a phrase by Friedrich Nietzsche, of all people, when he defines it as, long obedience in the same direction.

Now, he's not talking about motherhood, but that's what motherhood is. It's difficult. It is unpredictable. It is public. It is frustrating.

And yet, it is beautiful. Because it is consistent obedience in the direction of your child. Now, I know that as I say that, stories like that are hard for some ears.

And it may be that, for today, you feel the pain. Perhaps you have yearnings to be a mum and are not.

Or you are a mum and yet the relationship with your child is strained or non-existent. Or your children died in the womb.

[7 : 41] Or the word, love, just isn't the word that you would use to describe your mum's relationship to you. I don't talk about these things to rub salt into the wound.

I hope that, in a strange way, it validates the pain. Because it's the very best things in life that hurt the most when they're taken away.

That picture of that mum, who was there for her son, is a helpful mood to bring into our passage today, as we look at 2 Samuel 9.

We have the joy, today, of having a relatively short narrative to look at. Narrative is story. It's true story. And story, nonetheless.

And to read and understand a story, you need to feel it. You've got to sit in it. You've got to soak in it. And so to soak in 2 Samuel 9 today, we're going to work our way through it three times.

[8 : 45] Once for each of the main characters in the story. We're going to see that David is faithful and kind. Ziba is opportunistic. And Mephibosheth is loved.

So keep your Bibles open to 2 Samuel 9 as we think about David being the one who is faithful and kind. 2 Samuel 9 verse 1. David asked, Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?

We're not told who David asked this to. It seems like it's just sort of to the people who are before him in the palace. But we see his heart on display here.

Back in 1 Samuel 20, David had promised Jonathan, his friend, that he would show Jonathan unfailing kindness like the Lord's kindness. And that he would not cut off Jonathan's descendants.

And here we are in 2 Samuel 9 and David yearns to honour his word to Jonathan. He also made a promise with Saul in 1 Samuel 24 not to wipe out his descendants.

[9 : 57] You see, kings in the ancient world were a little bit like mafia bosses. If you rise to power, then you get rid of all competition. And so if there is a previous king and there are still some sons or some grandsons of his who may have a claim to the throne, well, you get rid of them to lock down your own power.

That would be expected for David. But instead of that, he wants to show kindness. Again, verse 3, when Ziba is brought to him, David says, Is there no one still alive from the house of Saul to whom I can show God's kindness?

Now, this is the only mention of God in the chapter. And he is here to show the kind of kindness that David wants to show. A few weeks ago, Jonathan really helpfully drew out for us this word, kindness.

The Hebrew word is chesed. It is covenanted kindness between God and his people. But it's not an equal thing.

It's not like a, I be kind to you and you be kind to me. It's weighted. In Exodus 34, Moses is up on the mountain. He's excited because God has promised to reveal himself to Moses.

[11 : 19] Moses hides in the cleft of the rocks that is not blown away by God's majesty and glory. And God reveals himself. He passes in front of Moses proclaiming, Exodus 34, 6, The Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

And that word love there is chesed. God abounds in kindness. It pours forth from his very being.

And when combined with his faithfulness, what that means is that his faithfulness to his people, to his word, to his promise, to his covenant, that means that if you are part of God's people, if you trust Jesus this morning, then God's kindness overflows to you.

Because he has promised that it will. God's disposition is long obedience of love in the same direction to you.

For he has promised it will be. And so for Israel, for God's people, the word chesed is like, it's like the song that a couple heard when they were dating. And then they hear it come on the radio years and years later.

[12 : 52] They might be at a rough point in their marriage. They're overrun by little bickering with each other. Tension and stress has sort of overtaken their relationship for a bit. And then their song plays.

And they remember the time where they heard that at a bar, where they were trying to impress each other. And they were laughing at each other's jokes.

And they were infatuated with one another. And the memories rekindle the love that was there at first. And they're brought back to who they really are.

And it covers over the temporary lull that they have found themselves to be in. They can laugh as they reminisce. Chesed is like that as we read in the Bible.

And so if in your mind you've turned God to being one who demands legalism from you, or if perhaps right now you are just struggling to believe that you haven't out-sinned God's ability to forgive, let God woo you back to him with his chesed.

[14 : 10] With his kindness that pours forth from him. That is what David wants to show to a descendant of Saul.

And for him to do that is to be God-like in his character. Because he wants to be faithful to his word to Jonathan.

He's told by his steward, Ziba, that there is a descendant. He's lame in both feet. All the better, from David's point of view.

To show the self-giving love of God in this life. And so he is brought to the palace. It ends up being quite a costly love for David.

Have a look at verse 9. Then the king summoned Ziba, Saul's steward, and said to him, I have given your master, that is Saul's grandson, Mephibosheth, everything that belonged to Saul and his family.

[15 : 08] You and your sons and your servants are to farm the land for him. And bring the crops so that your master's grandson may be provided for.

And Mephibosheth, grandson of your master, will always eat at my table. David could have brought all of these things into his own service.

But he gives it instead to the benefit of Mephibosheth. All of Saul's property, all of Ziba's family, all of Ziba's servants, 35 full-time workers, are now charged to provide for one man who grapples with disability.

It is extravagant. It seems a bit wasteful. This is not utilitarianism.

The greatest good for the greatest number. This is not consequentialism. The end justifies the means. This is an economy of scandalous grace.

[16 : 27] And in God's economy, that is what is right. And true. And good. Because love in the Christian life is based on the disposition of the lover, not the loveliness of the loved.

Let me say that again. Love in the Christian life is based on the disposition of the lover, not the loveliness of the loved.

And that should flow into our friendships, our marriages, our mothering. It is based in an economy where there's no scarcity of resources, for loving kindness pours forth endlessly from the God who sits on the throne.

It is long obedience in the same direction from David to Mephibosheth, and it mirrors the long obedience in the same direction from God to David. Kindness.

You know, our world simultaneously honours and scoffs at the idea of kindness. Primary schools love to tell children that kindness is just about the ultimate ethic.

[17 : 53] When we see kind acts, we intuitively consider them to be good. And yet, when we're building a life for ourselves, there's almost this magnetism away from kindness, towards, I don't know what the word is to describe it, but sort of strength or pragmatism, maybe.

What will work for me? We will hear people tell others that they're being too kind, which is kind of like a nice way of saying that they're being weak, or a walkover.

You see, for us as a society, kindness is this, like, wobbly ball that we don't quite know how to handle, and we can fall off it on one side or the other.

But kindness from the strong to the weak is a distinctly Christian idea. And our society has tried to hold onto it while throwing away the God who provides it.

Kindness from the strong to the weak is a strong to the weak. And so we don't know how to exercise it properly, and it starts to become a scarce resource. Kindness can only be healthy in your life when it is based on and resourced from the God who has shown it to you.

[19 : 14] You have finite resources of kindness, but God does not. It pours forth from his being. It enables David to show kindness to Mephibosheth, whatever the cost.

And so David is God-like in his faithfulness and his kindness. In contrast, Ziba is opportunistic.

And we won't spend much time on Ziba because we want to get to Mephibosheth, but it's important to see who this guy is to understand David's context. And when we realise that there are still enemies around David, it actually makes more of his kindness.

We need to read further in the book to uncover Ziba's real character, but there are hints here that he isn't as helpful and loyal to David as what he says. So verse 3, he doesn't reveal the other members of Saul's household who are still out there and may be a threat to David's kingship.

And there are others out there. Instead, he responds, verse 3, there is still a son of Jonathan. He's lame in both feet.

[20 : 32] And what Ziba is doing is he names the one descendant who's around, who is the lowest possible threat to David, and he quickly emphasises his disability. In verse 4, despite Ziba being Saul's steward, having responsibility for his household and having means, his sons and servants, he hasn't been looking after Mephibosheth.

He has presumably, quite happily, seen him banished from the land. This place, Lodabab, is on the east of the Jordan. It's out of sight.

It's out of mind for Ziba. What direction is Ziba long obedient to? It's not Mephibosheth.

It's not David. It's not God. It's Ziba. If we aren't being faithful to God, our world becomes smaller and we will always end up being faithful to ourselves.

The Bible calls that sin. And notice what it does to our relationships. The people around us become opportunities for us to serve ourselves.

[21 : 53] That's how David is seen by Ziba. And it's ugly. Have you seen that show Dance Mums? Is that a thing here?

These mothers in US dance academies who sort of push their children into competitive dancing and on their lips are the words, I'm doing this for you.

And yet as you watch the show, you know who the mums really care about. It's their own reputation. And it's how their children reflect on them. Ziba's like that.

The people around him are but pawns to care for Ziba. He is long obedient to his own desires and so he cares not for those around him.

He doesn't care for, for example, our final character for this morning, Mephibosheth, who is loved. Now in the story, as you work through it, from Mephibosheth's point of view, he doesn't know a thing about what is going on until verse 5 when he is, out of the blue, summoned to the king's palace.

[23 : 03] And you have to wonder what his emotional state is at that point. Some of you know what it is to be summoned to the principal's office.

Some of you many times. Or you've been called to the CEO's office but you don't know why she's called you. Even when you've done nothing wrong in these circumstances, it's a bit nerve-wracking.

How much more so when you are a descendant of the previous king and you have no way of defending yourself or escaping.

It seems like Mephibosheth's legs are functional but his feet are not. Movement, would it best be awkward and slow? He is very vulnerable. Verse 5, So King David had him brought from Lodabah, from the house of Machir, son of Amiel.

When Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honour. And from this point, he is at the mercy of the king.

[24 : 18] And he knows he has nothing to offer him. He can't labour in his field. He can't work in his house. He can't look after his animals. He can't pay his way out. He is, in his own words, a dead dog.

He is worthless to the king of a whole nation. The man who he is now before, the man who his grandfather Saul desperately wanted dead. What comes next?

David said, Mephibosheth. David hadn't been told his name up to this point. But it seems like he recognises him.

We have been told about Mephibosheth earlier on in 1 Samuel. It seems like at this point, David is delighted that this is the one he gets to show kindness to.

And so, trembling Mephibosheth is greeted by a kind face who welcomes him by name. He is told, don't be afraid, in verse 7. And he receives a promise of chesed.

[25 : 27] 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 what is more, you will always eat at my table.

And in case Mephibosheth is struggling to comprehend this or believe this, he then hears David say the same thing to Ziba. And Mephibosheth, grandson of your master, will always eat at my table.

It's made emphatic for us, the reader, in verse 11. So Mephibosheth ate at David's table like one of the king's sons. In Mephibosheth's autobiography, if it existed, this chapter would have the title sentence from a dead dog banished from the kingdom to being a son of the king eating at his table.

It's the same sentence that any Christian can write in their autobiography about the time they meet the risen Lord Jesus.

I think my favourite conversion story in the Bible is Saul's in Acts 9 before he's become Paul. He's been going from house to house, city to city, persecuting the church of Jesus Christ, locking people up.

[26 : 57] And then he's blinded on the road and he hears the voice and he says, who are you Lord? And he hears the words, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

And those words have a few implications for Saul. One, Jesus, though he died, is now alive.

Two, Saul's entire view of everything is so wrong. He has misunderstood God.

He's therefore misunderstood himself and he's misunderstood the world. Thirdly, the man with more power than any human to have ever lived is confronting him.

Saul is blind and terrified. He is a dead dog. You know the next thing he hears in Acts 9?

[28 : 08] He hears the voice of Ananias, a man who he had come to put in jail, a man who he hated, a man who knew Saul and what he was doing, but a man whose name means the Lord is gracious.

Saul is at the mercy of the king. And he hears Ananias say, brother Saul. He's welcomed into the family.

Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit. He is greeted by a kind face who welcomes him by name and the God of Chesed will now live within him.

And for the rest of his life, Paul would speak of how he was the worst of sinners, but that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. whether Mother's Day is a joy or a burden for you, you don't miss out.

God's love for you is stronger, more faithful, more kind and more personal than any mother's love could be.

[29 : 43] And it is not based on how lovely you are, but on how loving he is. The New Testament is so captured by this that it will say again and again these truths because it's so scandalous that it will only like seep into our minds through sheer repetition.

And so we read things like, for it is by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.

And we hear things like, at just the right time when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us or from Titus.

But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us not because of righteous things we have done, but because of his mercy.

He saved us so that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs like one of the king's sons, having the hope of eternal life.

[31 : 06] Saint Silas, as you are here today, no matter what you've done, no matter what you've become, Jesus invites you to sit at his table and share in his inheritance forever.

shall we pray? Heavenly Father, we are so thankful for Jesus because we are mindful that we come before you like dead dogs, having nothing to offer except our shame and except our sin and except our failings and except our weakness and you call us by name and you welcome us in with your kindness and so we pray that you would hold on to us all our days that we may forever sit at your table with our brother Jesus in whose name we pray.

Amen.