

David | The Once and Future King

A Seat at the King's Table (The Mephibosheth Story)

Second Samuel CH 9

1.3.22

(2nd Samuel CH 9) Then David said, "Is there yet 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 The king said, "Is there not yet anyone of the house of Saul to whom I may show the kindness of God?" And Ziba said to the king, "There is still a son of Jonathan who is crippled in both feet."⁴ So the king said to him, "Where is he?" And Ziba said to the king, "Behold, he is in the house of Machir the son of Ammiel in Lo-debar."⁵ Then King David sent and brought him from the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, from Lo-debar.⁶ Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, came to David and fell on his face and prostrated himself. And David said, "Mephibosheth." And he said, "Here is your servant!"⁷ David said to him, "Do not fear, for I will surely show kindness to you for the sake of your father Jonathan, and will restore to you all the land of your grandfather Saul; and you shall eat at my table regularly."⁸ Again he prostrated himself and said, "What is your servant, that you should regard a dead dog like me?"

⁹ Then the king called Saul's servant Ziba and said to him, "All that belonged to Saul and to all his house I have given to your master's grandson."¹⁰ "You and your sons and your servants shall cultivate the land for him, and you shall bring in the produce so that your master's grandson may have food; nevertheless Mephibosheth your master's grandson shall eat at my table regularly." 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 your servant will do." So Mephibosheth ate at David's table as one of the king's sons.¹² Mephibosheth had a young son whose name was Mica. And all who lived in the house of Ziba were servants to Mephibosheth.¹³ So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, for he ate at the king's table regularly. Now he was lame in both feet.

This is a sermon I'm excited to present... for a few different reasons. I had to skip over it when we were looking at the Life of David back in October. It's a story about a disabled man – I AM Mephibosheth! And it's a story about adoption – which, if you know our family, you know that's important to us. It's a great New Year's sermon because if it sticks with you, it'll change your whole year – really!

It comes from earlier in the David Story – from before the "fall" when David had recently taken the throne...after the death of David's best friend and the death of David's enemy, the Mad King, Saul.

And this charming story is a solid and moving picture of a truth that HAS to move us...a truth we too often forget to our own detriment/injury but if you could recall it as a picturesque story, it will motivate YOU.

So just to sort of put us INTO the story...this is all a part of what scholars call the “succession narrative”. Successions were a really big deal...when one administration gave way to a new one...it was ALMOST ALWAYS a bloody ordeal. David has conquered in every direction and suddenly like no time in previous history, Israel is established in the land. And David is supreme! Invincible!

That’s the whole sense of things in chapter 8. David is unrivaled in the North/South/East/West. BUT this is the Ancient Near East: IS there any such thing as un-rivaled? There are always challengers and foes around every corner! Watch your back! (cupbearer)

In fact 20th century scholars referred to this entire section, Chapter 9 to the end of the book as the succession narrative. It was expected, as soon as any king came to power, for him to systematically exterminate every possible rival he could find. There was a universal, almost overwhelming preoccupation with succession – “Who’s going to be the next king to knock the present king off his throne?” (O’Jays: “What they doin’?!”) We saw it in Saul.

But remarkably that kind of paranoid obsession is absent from David’s outlook. He’s not driven by fear. He’s driven by covenant loyalty.

See, way-back-when (1 Sam 18) David made a vow to his dearest friend Jonathan. It said “David loved Jonathan as himself,” and David promised to show Jonathan the “hesed” of the Lord (divine kindness, loyalty, love and mercy...of the LORD.)

And now, even though David’s friend is dead and when other kings would be frantically trying to eliminate any person who had any possible claim to the throne - any sons of the former king, grandsons, nephews, brothers, cousins – when other kings would’ve been driven by fear to carry out a search and destroy mission, David was on a “search and show hesed mission.” Driven not by fear but by loyalty to a covenant made between friends.

So David inquires: “Are there any remaining relatives of Saul to whom I can show kindness (hesed) for Jonathan’s sake? For the sake of my friend...and our sacred promise.”

And they find just one remaining person. He’s a no name - known in v.3, only as a generic “son of Jonathan who’s crippled in both feet.” And he lives in the boondocks in some remote wasteland called “Lo-Debar (No Pasture)”.

So David sends to this forsaken place and you can bet the king sent a big motorcade (Black Escalades!).

They go to Lo-Debar and apparently bring him to David. And David remembers the boy - now a grown man - remembers how (at 5 yrs old) he was injured in a fall recorded in Ch. 4. His nurse was trying to "get out 'a Dodge" – like recent scenes from Afghanistan: war...panic...Bedlam...escape with just the clothes on your back... The nurse is scrambling trying to save her little charge but she trips and falls ON HIM the child and both ankles are shattered and never fused properly...and she hides with him in this horrible outback to live in secrecy...(no place for a prince)

Probably the nurse tells the little boy, "You is kind ...you is smart...you is important! And you WOULD be KING OF ISRAEL today...if not for that mean sheep-herder...that DAVID...yuck! DAVID (let's never say that name!" "He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named", "the Dark Lord")

"But nurse...maybe we can go talk to King David ...and maybe he'll let me be the king... Can we?"

"NO sweetheart...that's not how this works...he's a bad man and we have to stay away from him forever... if he ever gets us he'll kill us!"

"But...but ...you won't let that happen, will you? You'll protect me, won't you?!"

"I sure will sweetie...never fear... nurse is here!"

Now I have to say, whatever good or bad might be said about political correctness, as a disabled man, I really don't much care for the word "crippled." I mean as a society - aren't we past that? Today disabled people can do anything - right? And the word "crippled" sounds so... crude.

But we're not reading about 21st C America with our elevators and titanium ultralight-chairs and legislation protecting the disabled. We're talking about a culture where the harsh realities of physical weakness could NOT be overcome or neutralized. If you were disabled there - you were crippled.

And what we have here is a picture of a man without a name - in utter obscurity - living in apparent poverty with nothing to offer - posing no threat - a pitiable picture of wretchedness/disgrace, frailty and forsakenness/forgotten-ness...and worse.

A man, once the son of the prince, once destined for the throne now crippled and forgotten (Prince --> Pauper).

BUT not forgotten by the true king.

And when the entourage, the posse arrives - the day the crippled man had always dreaded – "The jig's up-I'm found out - I must die - legally I'm the rival."

And when the king approaches this miserable cripple, the man cowers and falls on his face and the king says one word (v. 6) “Mephibosheth”. He remembered the man’s name. And the man, trembling responds, “Yes sir, your servant.”

And seeing the panic of this frail, broken young man David immediately offers words of solace. “Do not fear for I will surely show you “Hesed” (covenant loyalty, kindness-grace, mercy) for the sake of your father Jonathan; I will restore to you all the lands which belonged to your family and you shall eat at my table regularly.”

Mephibosheth can’t believe what’s happening - it’s way too good to be true. “What is your servant that you should regard a dead dog like me?” (How’s THAT for a healthy self-image?! SELF-IMAGE ...keep that in mind!)

How David’s face and eyes looked when he heard those words, I can only imagine. (You are no dead dog to me!)

And the King fulfills the promises directly. V. 11 “So Mephibosheth ate at David’s table as one of the king’s (own) sons.”

David adopts this wretched cripple...this dead dog. He’s excluded no more. He’s again the son of a king (see v. 13): “So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem and he ate at the king’s table regularly” and his legs got better and he made a real contribution to the palace. Nope - passage ends, “Now he was lame in both feet” (found that way/stayed that way - no help to the team).

I guess IF you’re acquainted with Christianity and the Gospel, the picture is clear. But in case you’re not seeing it – let me try and spell it out.

This is a picture of a King without a rival, so powerful that no one could even dream of opposing Him with any success at all. His would-be rivals should rightly be exterminated. That’s what kings do (it’s justice).

But instead – God, the King, remembers an agreement - a covenant made with a dear Friend. And out of loyalty to that beloved Friend, God the Father searches for these rivals and finds us, forgotten, scattered (outside the pasture!) We fear His approach. We panic. We fear condemnation. We doubt His intentions; we dread His power. (Like the Prodigal!)

And He finds us - so pitiful - so crippled, so weak/powerless...and... He remembers us; He addresses us. He calls us by name but we doubt His kindness (“Must be a trick” – ‘cause he’s the enemy...our nurse told us so!”).

The Prodigal was so certain that he'd be rejected and he prattles his confession and the reasons he ought to be rejected but the Father kisses him to silence the chatter.

And so the Great King says, "I show you kindness for the sake of My eternal agreement with My Beloved, Jesus Christ. My Son agreed to obey for you and take the blame for your crimes against the Throne. The display of His grace is the meaning of the world, the reason I made the cosmos."

And now for His sake, for Jesus' sake (the Friend who's closer than a brother [Pro 18.24] ...the better Jonathan), I will show you this kindness, will bless you, will adopt you and call you, My son. And you will eat at My table-regularly and forever - and when we hear that- still we protest, "Why regard a dead dog like me?"

But above and beyond our protests - God the Father for the sake of His beloved One (Jesus Christ), the Father goes about the restoration and keeps bringing us to His table. "I love you - as a son - you belong here."

This is a picture of the Perfect King and His perfect Kingdom - the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of grace. He doesn't welcome us because we're no longer messed up or because we're trying so hard to be better. He sees our continued lameness and His love for us is totally consistent - doesn't go up and down based on how much we pray, witness, give, come to church, contribute, produce.

And the BIG question facing each of us now - to slightly misquote Jack Nicholson - is "Can you handle this truth?" Can you, will you face up to BOTH sides of this spiritual/moral equation - this dual self-image?

Will you see yourself wretched and rebellious, a family-member of the defeated tyrant, a fugitive from justice - able to say with St. Paul, "I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh..." (Rom 7.18) - I don't DO enough and I am NOT enough...in myself. Can you see yourself and say, "I AM Mephibosheth!" ("T.J., c'mon, that's a really sad self-image!") Sad, but true... and if you don't see that and face it, Christianity will never really make sense to you.

But, for everyone IN Christ, adopted by God, it's NOT the whole story. "I AM Mephibosheth...and when I had strayed away from the fold (Lodebar) the Good Shepherd, the Better David sent His Advocate (the Holy Spirit) and showed me hesed ...Covenant Kindness from the King who searches for rivals in order to declare them SONS!"

Do you, will you, see yourself as adopted by the True King and seated where you belong - at His Table? YOU ARE A ROYAL! Can/will you face that?

Will you daily face this new year seeing yourself for who you are and God for who He is and will you take your place at the King's Table?

When we're tempted, we can say, "Um... that's just NOT who I am... I'm a royal...I'm a beloved son of God and I don't want to waste myself on that. I may still be LAME IN MY TWO FEET (as ol' Mephibosheth was...to the end of the story) but I am NOW seated at the Table...and a place awaits me at the Eternal Feast...so...no thanks. That's a part of the old me..."

God has chosen me... I am dear to Him and His love for is based on His Covenant (the eternal promise) and NOT based on MY ENOUGH-NESS.

So we continue daily to face these dual truths – my OWN moral poverty (poorer than I think!) and God's adopting grace (more beautiful than I've noticed) May God use this Food to sustain us in this pursuit throughout this coming year.

The Communion

Everyone who has been called out of Lodebar (NO PASTURE) and has been reunited to the fold, Come to this Table... and eat the King's Food.

If you're NOT united to the Fold (BY which I mean, if you're not a member of some church – NOT necessarily this church – you may be visiting today from a church you normally attend) if you have publically agreed to live the Christian life with a group of real flesh-and-blood fellow believers – a church – then come to the Table.

If you're NOT in that situation – PLEASE! – let us help you. Meet with Phil or me or any of the men or women who hang around up here after the church and we'll direct you to entering or re-entering the fold... to take your seat at the Kings Table. We want to include you as God includes... authentically according to God's way.

When you come... rehearse those two sides of your self-image – "In my flesh, I am Mephibosheth – but in the Spirit, only because of Jesus Christ – I have been reclaimed and I have a seat at the King's Table..."

Rehearse that as you come and every day in this coming year...and see how it changes the way you think, speak and act.

After the words of institution – please come as the ushers dismiss you – to the outside and back through the center aisle.