

Radio Broadcast for August 8, 2010

## Good News for Dead Dogs

### 2 Samuel 9:8

What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?

This is a delightful and familiar story. David has become the King of Israel, just as God had purposed and revealed through the prophet Samuel. It was customary in those days that a new king would kill all the descendents of the former king in order to assure that there would be no rivals to his throne. The Bible tells us that the war between the house of Saul and the house of David was long and hard, but in time, the household of David won.

However, David had been very close friends with Jonathan, King Saul's son. He had made a promise to Jonathan that he would not destroy Jonathan's household when he became king. At the end of his war with the house of Saul, David asks if there is any left of Saul's household that he might show him mercy for Jonathan's sake.

The only one left was Mephibosheth. The Scriptures say of him:

Jonathan son of Saul had a son who was lame in both feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel. His nurse picked him up and fled, but as she hurried to leave, he fell and became crippled. His name was Mephibosheth.

David had Mephibosheth come to Jerusalem to live with him and eat at his table. When Mephibosheth, the grandson of Saul, came

into the presence of the King, and hear his words of kindness, he says, “What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me.”

I would like to look at this story from the viewpoint of Mephibosheth - how David's goodness to him impressed him with a sense of his own worthlessness and filled him with awe.

Let us start with Mephibosheth's description of himself. In our day, we hear a great deal about self image. One notable preacher has gone so far as to say that our worst sin is low self-esteem. But Mephibosheth rightly understood his position before the King. Mephibosheth called himself a dead dog. Not much worse could be said of a man. It was a universally understood sign of contempt. Dogs were not held in high esteem in the first place. It is the nature of dogs to eat carrion – rotting flesh, which would be highly offensive in the Jewish economy. The only thing that could be worse than a carrion-eating dog was a dead dog. Such an animal is unclean on two accounts: its actions make it unclean, and the fact that it is dead makes it doubly unclean.

This is a good description of us: we are doubly unclean. Our trespasses and our sins make us unclean and fit only for judgment. Furthermore, we are not just *in* our trespasses and sins, but Ephesians 2 says that we are *dead* in our trespasses and sins. Every one of us is born spiritually dead, insensible to the Word of God and emitting the foul stench of our own righteousness which is nothing more than filthy rags.

Why would Mephibosheth call himself a dead dog? In 1 Samuel 24:14 David uses “dead dog” to indicate something of no value or significance, not even worth the trouble of destroying. The only description of Mephibosheth up to this point in the Bible is that he is a descendant of Saul and Jonathan and is crippled in both his

feet. That makes him an enemy of the household of David and useless to the furtherance of David's Kingdom: an enemy by birth and useless by condition. This is a description of us. By birth we are enemies of God, being of the household of Adam. Furthermore, because of our condition we are useless to God.

In 2 Samuel 16:9 we find the phrase "dead dog" used to describe a rebel against the king. Likewise, each one of us is a rebel against King Jesus. Everyone born into this world is a rebel against God until God reconciles his heart. Romans 8:7 teaches us that the carnal or natural mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. How hard it is for the religious man to admit he has been a rebel against God! Those of us raised in churches may find it particularly hard to accept the fact that we were rebels against God until He regenerated our hearts and we believed His Word.

When did Mephibosheth come to an understanding of his worthlessness? It was not until after he heard David's gracious words that he confessed his utter unworthiness. Earlier, in verse 6, Mephibosheth had tried to ingratiate himself to David by referring to himself as David's servant. Likewise, all who approach God through the law do the same thing: they try to spare their lives through servitude to God. But God's people do not serve Him to gain His favor. Rather, they serve Him because they are assured they already have His favor!

David had something better than "servant" in mind, and when Mephibosheth heard of it, then, and only then was he was humbled. It is not the law that humbles a man, but the gospel. One of the first and surest signs of a work of grace is this attitude of awe and wonder that God should take notice of a person. "What is man that thou art mindful of him?" David gave Mephibosheth all the rights and privileges of a King's son. Verse 11 tells us that

Mephibosheth ate at the king's table just like the King's sons. Indeed, Mephibosheth could sing, "Amazing Grace" with full understanding. He had gone from rebel slave to King's son with a word!

Now let us look at the blessing that David gave to Mephibosheth, for they are like the blessings that God gives to each of His unworthy elect. Note carefully David's words.

“Don't be afraid.” How often did the Lord, Himself, have to say these words to His disciples! Mephibosheth likely thought he was being brought to David to be condemned. But David inasmuch says, “I have not brought you here to kill you, but to do you good.” God's first word of grace to our hearts is this, “Fear not.” Any form of religion that does not remove fear is not the gospel. Only in the gospel do we find the truth of God's holiness and the truth of our sinfulness joined in such a way that we no longer need to fear the wrath of God. When and where did this joining occur? On Calvary's cross. When the soul of our Lord Jesus was made a sin offering, God's holiness and our sin met in one Person; and there the Holiness of God was satisfied and our sin put away. As it is written, “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.”

“I will surely show you kindness.” “Kindness” comes from the same Hebrew word that God used in the prophet Isaiah when He spoke of the sure mercies of David. David showed mercy to Mephibosheth for he, himself had been shown great mercy by God. The same sort of mercies is shown to every blood-bought sinner.

“For the sake of your father Jonathan.” David's merciful decree was not because of anything to be found in Mephibosheth. Rather, all the goodness David showed to Mephibosheth came from the love and favor David had for Jonathan.

“I will restore all that was lost.” During David’s war with the house of Saul, all of Saul’s possessions had been taken as spoil. David restored it all to Mephibosheth. And all the inheritance of Adam was lost when he declared war on God, thus we were likewise deprived of life and fellowship with God. But, God restored to us everything that we lost in Adam, and adds to that the blessing of eternal sonship.

“You will eat at my table.” To eat at the King’s table was to be highly favored and well-nourished. David wrote that God prepares a table for us in the presence of our enemies. It is the table of Christ. Figuratively speaking, we eat of the flesh and blood of the Lord Jesus when, by faith, we receive the benefits of His sacrifice.

“You are like one of my sons.” David made his enemy into his son. God does the same thing when He redeems us from the law by the death of His Son, and we go from being rebel slaves to willing sons.

How did David’s kindness affect Mephibosheth? We have seen that Mephibosheth’s status was changed. He went from being under a sentence of death to being blessed at the King’s table. He went from slave to son.

But he was still the same Mephibosheth by nature. The story starts like this: "There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in both feet." The story ends like this: And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king's table, and he was crippled in both feet.” Mephibosheth’s status changed, but his self-condition did not. There is a devilish lie taught to many who trust the Lord, a subtle form of legalism by which false prophets bring poor sinners back under the bondage of the Law. It goes like this: Salvation changes a man’s desires so that he no longer wants

to sin, and therefore, his lifestyle will be much improved after salvation, or has not, indeed, been saved. This is merely the hiss of that Accuser of the Brethren, who has sought to bring God's people under the bondage of the law ever since Christ made them free of it.

Here is the truth: Everyone who has believed Christ has all the same fleshly desires he ever had, and will discover that temptation is as much a trouble to him now as it ever was. And he will also discover that he has no more self-power to overcome it than before: He is still crippled in both his feet!

However, despite his continued weakness and inability, he lives in the King's city and He eats the King's food and sits at the King's table.

May God teach us that we are like Mephibosheth, the son of Saul by birth and nature, but Mephibosheth, the son of David, by grace.