

2 Samuel 19, The graciousness of the king

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[0 : 0 0] So let me read God's word for us to Samuel chapter 19 verse 9. Throughout the tribes of Israel, all the people were arguing among themselves and saying, the king delivered us from the hand of our enemies. He is the one who rescued us from the hand of the Philistines, but now he has fled the country to escape from Absalom, and Absalom whom we anointed to rule over us has died in battle.

So why do you say nothing about bringing the king back? King David sent this message to Zadok and Abathar, the priests, asked the elders of Judah, why should you be the last to bring the king back to his palace, since what is being said throughout Israel has reached the king at his quarters? You are my relatives, my own flesh and blood. Why should you be the last to bring back the king? Say to Amasa, are you not my own flesh and blood? May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if you are not the commander of my army for life in place of Joab. He won over the hearts of the men of Judah, so that they were all of one mind.

They sent word to the king, return all your men. Then the king returned and went as far as the Jordan. Now the men of Judah had come to Gilgal to go out and meet the king and bring him across to Jordan.

Shimei, the son of Gerai, the Benjamite from Bahurim, hurried down with the men of Judah to meet King David. With him were a thousand Benjamites, along with Ziba, the steward of Saul's household, and his fifteen sons and twenty servants. They rushed to the Jordan where the king was. They crossed at the ford to take the king's household over and to do whatever he wished. When Shimei, the son of Gerai, crossed the Jordan, he fell prostrate before the king and said to him, My lord, do not hold me guilty. Do not remember how your servant did wrong on the day my lord the king left Jerusalem. May the king put it out of his mind. For I, your servant, know that I have sinned.

[2 : 0 0] But today I have come here as the first from the tribes of Joseph to come down and meet my lord the king. Then Abishai, the son of Zariah, said, Shouldn't Shimei be put to death for this? He cursed the Lord's anointed. David replied, What does this have to do with you, sons of Zariah? What right do you have to interfere? Should anyone be put to death in Israel today? Don't I know that I am king over Israel? So the king said to Shimei, You shall not die. And the king promised him on oath.

Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson, also went down to meet the king. He had not taken care of his feet or trimmed his mustache or washed his clothes from the day the king left until the day he returned safely. When he came from Jerusalem to meet the king, the king asked him, Why didn't you go with me, Mephibosheth? He said, My lord the king, since I, your servant, am lame, I said, I will have my donkey saddled and I will ride on it so that I can go with the king. But Ziba, my servant, betrayed me.

He has slandered your servant to my lord the king. My lord the king is like an angel of God, so do whatever you wish. All of my grandfather's descendants deserve nothing but death from my lord the king, but you gave your servant a place among those who eat at your table. So what right do I have to make any more appeals to the king? The king said to him, Why say more? I order you and Ziba to divide the land. Mephibosheth said to the king, Let him take everything, now that my lord the king has returned home safely. Barzillia the Gileadite also came down from Rogalim to cross the Jordan with the king and to send him on his way from there. Now Barzillia was very old, 80 years of age. He had provided for the king during his stay at Mahanim, for he was a very wealthy man. The king said to Barzillia, Cross over with me and stay with me in Jerusalem and I will provide for you. But Barzillia answered the king, How many more years shall I live that I should go up to Jerusalem with the king? I'm now 80 years old. Can I tell the difference between what is enjoyable and what is not?

Can your servant taste what he eats and drinks? Can I still hear the voices of the male and female singers? Why should your servant be an added burden to my lord the king?

Your servant will cross over the Jordan with the king for a short distance, but why should the king reward me in this way? Let your servant return that I may die in my own town near the tomb of my father and my mother. But here is your servant Kimham. Let him cross over with my lord the king. Do for him whatever you wish. The king said, Kimham shall cross over with me and I will do for him whatever you wish and anything you desire from me I will do for you. So all the people crossed the Jordan and then the king crossed over. The king kissed Barzillia and bade him farewell and Barzillia returned home.

[4 : 56] When the king crossed over to Gilgal, Kimham crossed with him. All the troops of Judah and half the troops of Israel had taken the king over. Soon all the men of Israel were coming to the king and saying to him, why did our brothers, the men of Judah, steal the king away and bring him and his household across the Jordan together with his men? All the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, we did this because the king is closely related to us. Why are you angry about it? Have we eaten any of the king's provision?

Have we taken anything for ourselves? Then the men of Judah answered them, sorry, then the men of Israel answered the men of Judah. We have 10 shares in the king, so we have a greater claim on David than you have. Why then do you treat us with contempt? Weren't we the first to speak of bringing back our king?

But the men of Judah pressed their claims even more forcefully than the men of Israel. Well, that's God's word for us this morning. Do keep that open in front of you. We are going to follow along as we work our way through the story together. I think probably if you have been around churches for any length of time, you might have noticed that Christians have this habit of calling one another brother or sister. You might have heard that this morning as you walked in, but I know we live in a corner of the world where everyone calls each other bro, right? So it maybe doesn't stand out to as an extraordinary thing, but the truth is that churches like to think of themselves and like to talk of themselves as being like families. Communities of people where their relationships between one another are strong and meaningful and purposeful. Now, it is definitely true that churches do not always live up to that hype, right? You might have experienced that. Brothers and sisters in church fall out just as much as brothers and sisters in families fall out. Maybe that's put you off church in the past.

But still, you don't have to read much of the Bible to know that churches is meant to be a family like that. The New Testament calls the church the household of God, the idea that we are all in God's house and we are brothers and sisters together. The house which is not this building, but the house which is the kingdom which Jesus is building, a community with strong bonds between one another. In fact, this is meant to be the distinctive of the church, that the bonds between one another in the life of the church are meant to distinguish the church from any other grouping in the world. You know, so things which would be strong enough to put people off having a friendship or a relationship with one another outside of the church are set to one side inside the church as people come together as brothers and sisters. So black and white, rich and poor, young and old, drug addicts and doctors, prisoners and police officers, taxi drivers and parking wardens, Arsenal fans and Spurs fans, all brothers and sisters together in the church. And what I want to show you from 2 Samuel chapter 19 this morning is why that is the case. Why is it so that churches have relationships in them that you wouldn't see anywhere else in the world? Why is it that the community of the church breaks down the barriers that the world sets up? What is it about the church that sticks people together like that? Now, in order to see that, we are going to have to work our way through the story and do a little bit of work together. But I think it should be obvious once we do that. It will help you if you've not been here before to know that this is the story of King David. 2 Samuel traces the reign of King David, one of Israel's most famous kings. And in the part of the story that we are in, he has been betrayed by his son Absalom. Absalom has kicked him out of the palace, kicked him out of Jerusalem, robbed the kingdom from David. And then there was a civil war, between Absalom's forces and David's forces. And David, with a little help from a forest, defeated Absalom and his army. And then Absalom has been killed. Now, if you look at the passage that we've just read, you'll notice then that having all those events happened, the passage this morning starts with a great deal of confusion. Absalom, the king, the one that they anointed as king, is dead.

[9 : 22] So who knows what's going to happen next? So much so that in the second sentence, all the people are arguing throughout all the tribes. This is like a national mess. And the exact nature of the problem is spelt out at the end of verse 9 and 10. David, who is the most famous king, who has saved the nation from the Philistines, he is alive, but he's on the run from Absalom. And now Absalom, the one who most of the nation had backed as the new king, is dead. So what are they going to do? He's being judged and condemned by God. So there's national confusion. People are all going in different directions.

What you've got at the start of the passage is the opposite of cohesion. You've got everybody splitting up and arguing all the time. You've got disunity, not unity at the beginning of the passage. All the people arguing all the time. There's also a really particular fracture in the nation, one which grows in significance in the Old Testament story. Now you might not notice this at first, but if you look at the end of verse 10, the U there refers to the tribe of Judah. What's going on here is that the northern tribes of Israel are saying to Judah, why don't you bring your king back to Jerusalem? That fact becomes clearer at the end of the chapter when we find the arguments between the tribes carrying on in verse 41. We jump down to the end, the 10 northern tribes are arguing against Judah about who owns the king. It might be worth you knowing as you read the Bible that the nation splits into 10 northern tribes and one southern tribe, that the 12th tribe, the tribe of the Levites, is kind of spread all amongst them. And this starts here. You get to see it here. The northern tribes are saying to Judah that you've effectively stolen David from us to install him as your king. And they're arguing about it with one another. And Judah say, no, he's our flesh and blood. He belongs to us. Then Israel bring up the ratio. It's 10 to 1. But none of that seems to get solved. And the end of the chapter ends with those ominous words where it says the men of Judah pressed their claims more forcefully than the men of Israel. Literally, their words are heavier, more weighty, more forceful, and they carry the day for the time being. Now, there's more that could be said about that fracture, and I'll mention it briefly again in a moment. But notice for now that our passage begins with fighting and ends with fighting. So there's squabbling and disunity at both the beginning and the end of the passage.

And what you have in the middle is five different encounters with King David. First with the priests, then with Shimei, then Ziba and Mephibosheth, and then Barzillia. And we're just going to work through those quickly and see the theme pop out, hopefully, as we do that. So let's start first with the priests in verse 11 to 15. David's first action, as he is called back to Jerusalem, is to speak to these Levite priests and send them ahead of him to ask Judah to bring him back to Jerusalem. But notice the detail of how he does this. In verse 12, he points out to them that they are his brothers. I'm from Judah, he says, you're my flesh and bone. David knows that it's not their family relationship which is the real issue. Instead, Judah's reluctance to bring him back as king is because, and you'll imagine this, wouldn't it, they all supported Absalom. A few weeks previous to this, those guys had come out to fight David. So of course, they're not going to now welcome him back in because, well, they are all traitors. And so they're going to be terrified that David is going to exact some kind of punishment on them. Under the command of a guy called Amasa, they'd marched out against David. And notice what David does. He tells the priest to do something absolutely extraordinary.

[13 : 18] Look at verse 13. He says, priest, tell Amasa, tell Amasa who was the guy who was in charge of the army that was marching against me, tell him that I appoint him in the place of Joab to be commander of my army.

Wow, that's brilliant. Not only is it a brilliant thing, it's holding Joab to account for disobeying David's orders and killing Absalom, but more clearly what's going on here is that this is him absolving all of that army against their responsibility for being traitors. Listen, Amasa, I know you let the forces against me, but you are forgiven and you're now head of my army. What incredible generosity. You're all forgiven. And the plan works, doesn't it? Verse 14, we're told that Judah's heart is swayed. David crosses the Jordan River and in verse 15, he's on his way back to Jerusalem as the king.

Next, David meets on his way back the guy called Shimei. Now, if you remember Shimei, he's got some groveling to do because back in chapter 16, if you were with us, he met David on his way out of Jerusalem and lobbed stones at him and hurled insults at him. He called David a worthless man or a scoundrel, I think as the NIV translates it. It's clear now, isn't it? That that was a terrible, terrible, terrible mistake. That's like being at school and insulting someone terribly and then

realizing that they all substitute teacher, right? And you're like, oh, shouldn't have said that, right? Shimei now realizes, oh my goodness, David is now the king again. I really probably shouldn't have been insulting him and throwing stones at him. And so he rushes down, doesn't he? Begging for forgiveness for the wrong that he knows he's done. It's all very good, isn't it? But in a way, it's unclear how sorry he is because in verse 17, he brings a thousand men with him, which reads rather like a garrison of soldiers just in case it gets ugly. But it didn't. And despite Abishai asking to kill him again, still in verse 22 and verse 23, David says to him, what does this have to do with you, sons of Zariah? What right do you have to interfere? Should anyone be put to death in Israel today? Don't I know that today I am king over Israel? Verse 23. So the king said to Shimei, you shall not die. How gracious of David to Shimei. After that, he meets Ziba and Mephibosheth. [15:35] Ziba, if you remember, is the guy who's meant to be looking after Mephibosheth, the cripple. Mephibosheth is crippled and he is Jonathan's son and David is being kind to him. But at the same time, he has betrayed Mephibosheth. He told David a lie, didn't he? He told David that Mephibosheth was hoping to become the king himself. Anyway, now Ziba is also running across the Jordan to meet David and help him out with his bags. And when they get to Jerusalem in verse 25, they meet Mephibosheth. And David is told exactly what did happen. He's told that actually he didn't want to get his kingdom back. Instead, Ziba had tricked him and abandoned him and left him stuck in Jerusalem so that he couldn't flee with David when Absalom arrived. It's not just Mephibosheth's word though, is it, that David gets to take? It's not just Mephibosheth saying, no, Ziba didn't bring me with you, which is what I asked him to do. He has a great witness to the truth of what he's saying. What is the witness of Mephibosheth to the truth of his claim? Well, it's his smell. Yeah, he smells, he stinks. Why? Because he's not being looking after himself. He's not washed his clothes. He's not trimmed his mustache since David left. It's kind of gross really, isn't it? It sounds like he's really kind of stinky. But the guy is a mess. And I think we're to understand that means two things. One is that Mephibosheth hadn't hidden from Absalom that actually he wanted to be with King David. Every time Absalom bumped into him in Jerusalem,

Mephibosheth, you stink. He's like, yes, that's because I'm for David, not for you. And also it's almost as if Mephibosheth has sort of in his own way joined David in exile in the wilderness, isn't it? You know, you might be going off to the wilderness. I wanted to go with you. I can't go with you. So I'm going to live a kind of wilderness life inside of Jerusalem. Anyway, David's response in verse 29 is to restore his inheritance. And amazingly, Mephibosheth replies that he doesn't want it. It is enough for him that King David has returned. Then you get a guy called Barzillia the Gileadite. I think that's another one of my favorite names in the Bible, Barzillia the Gileadite. Back in chapter 17, Barzillia had been the guy who provided for David and his family when they arrived in exile. And he is extremely old. I know some of you are amused by that because he's only 80, isn't he? That's not extremely old, is it? Anyway, he is a very wealthy man and he has provided for David. And David wants to extend to him the same kindness that he has received. So he invites him to return to Jerusalem with him. But Barzillia says he doesn't want it.

I'm too old to taste the good food anyway. I'd rather stay here and be buried with my father and my mother, he says, and suggests instead that he takes a complete stranger, a guy called Kimham, with him instead. Who presumably, maybe we're not told, but probably was a relative of Barzillias. Now David does that. And significantly in Jeremiah 41, there is a place near Bethlehem named Kimham, which I think indicates that David has done for this guy everything he promised, even though he was a total stranger to him. Now that is like a super quick run through the passage, but just zoom out with me for a moment and try and see the whole thing together. Okay, so it begins and ends with rivalry and fighting. And what you've got in between are five encounters with David, where in each of the encounters, and this is the key to understanding what's going on here. In each of these encounters, David is gracious to his enemies, forgiving and promoting the captain of Absalom's army, who only a few days ago had been trying to kill him, allowing Shimei, the guy who'd thrown stones at him to go unpunished, restoring Mephibosheth and even Ziba, and giving a total stranger, Kimham, a place at his table, and eventually in a village outside Bethlehem. Verse 14 is about the effect on Judah, but I think it sums up the whole thing. And that is that David has swayed the heart of all the men of Judah to become one man with him. Now I grant you this is going to unravel in chapters to come. But for now, in this little snapshot, and at this kind of overarching height, what you've got is this, okay? You have got the grace of King David being the glue of the nation, sticking it together. In other words, right at the center of the chapter, what the

writer wants us to see is that it's not actually David's political skill. It's not his military might that is going to hold this fragile nation together. Rather, it is the fact that King David is consistently resolved to move towards his people in mercy and grace, forgiveness and love, to give them what they don't deserve and spare them from the judgment they do deserve. So much so that in the middle of a chapter of chaos, at the beginning and the end, attention is just perpetually drawn to the graciousness of God's anointed king. The leader of God's people is gracious. He absorbs in himself the cost of people's rebellion and restores them to himself. Interestingly, in 1 Kings chapter 12, the nation does split apart. This crack between Judah and the other 10 tribes becomes a huge rift and the nation is split in two forever. And what is it that splits the nation? If you know the story, David's grandson, a guy called Rehoboam, shows absolutely no grace and no mercy to the nation and it splits apart.

[21 : 03] And what you've got here is the opposite of 1 Kings 12. You've got the grace of David gluing the nation together, bringing people together. Now you might read that and go, okay, so David's graciousness brings people together. That's a great moral example, isn't it?

And it is. If you are a father or a mother or an uncle or an aunt or a grandparent, bringing people together in your family requires grace and mercy and forgiveness. It's the extent to which you are able to extend mercy and forgiveness to one another that you will glue your families together and not rip them apart. It's the same for a friendship group at school or a team at work.

But if you've been with us for this series in 2 Samuel, you will know that the point of these stories is not just a moral example for you and for me. You and I are not David in the story. That's not how we're meant to read it. What's going on here is David is a signpost, a pointer forwards to a future king, to King Jesus. The Bible would call it like a type. David is a type of Christ. This is how the Bible works, you see. So there is one story from the beginning to the end of your Bible.

Now, it's written by lots of different authors, but it is inspired by the Holy Spirit all the way through. So there is only one story. The story of the Bible is the story of how the creator God, the triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit, saves a rebellious creation for an eternity with him in a remade world. And the story centers on the plan of the Father, accomplished in the work of the Son, in the power of the Spirit. So much so that the Old Testament, before the coming of the Son, the birth of Christ, that the story is shadowed in various different types. So what you've got in the Old Testament is the story of the whole thing summarized on a number of different occasions. Let me give you a few famous examples. Noah's Ark. What is going on in Noah's Ark is not a great moral that when it rains, you need to build a boat. That's not what's going on. No, it is a type. The Ark is a type of Christ. A picture of the cross where we find rescue from the flood of God's judgment through the forgiveness of Christ on the cross. Come to the cross, says Noah's Ark. Get in the boat. It's the only place of safety from the judgment of God. Take the rescue of Israel from slavery in Egypt. It's a type or a picture of Christ's rescue. Christ is the true Passover lamb who is painted on the beams, not of our doorposts, but on the cross, rescuing us from slavery, not in Egypt, but slavery to sin under the judgment that that deserves. And David, when we come to 2 Samuel, David is a type of Christ, a prototype, if you like, of the king of God's people, the shepherd of God's sheep. I have a kingdom, says God, a people for myself, and I appoint a king to be ruler over them who will love them and take care of them and be gracious to them.

And sometimes and oftentimes, David fails and points us to the fact that we need someone better than David. And here in chapter 19, we see that what we really need to bring God's people together is a gracious, forgiving, merciful king. And that's exactly what we've got.

[24 : 27] When we jump forward to the New Testament, it's perhaps no surprise that we find that at the center of Christ's kingdom, the center of the church, the glue that keeps together this disparate group of people is not Jesus's political skill. It's not his military might. It's not his brute strength.

Instead, it is his grace and his mercy. It is not our commitment to moral living, which keeps the church together. It's Christ's forgiveness in the face of our immoral living. We have a king who takes sinners who were his enemies and moves towards them as a savior, cancelling their sin. You know, as we read 2 Samuel 19, we're to think, you know, I'm a spiritual amasser. I've marched out in rebellion against King Jesus, but in his great kindness, he's invited me to join his people and his army. I'm like Shimei. I've cursed Christ. I've thrown stones at his followers. I am full of regret for what I've done, but Christ has shown me grace. Mephibosheth and Ziba who have just not been wholehearted, they find mercy. I'm a stranger.

I'm like Kim Ham. Who's ever heard of Kim Ham? No one, right? I'm a Kim Ham. I'm a nobody. Yet Jesus shows me mercy, gives me a place in his kingdom. No one too bad, no one too far away, no one beyond the pale, all brought together as one kingdom because like in 2 Samuel 19, King Jesus is full of grace and it's that grace which is the glue of the kingdom. Now let me kind of emphasize this and rub this in a little bit more and I want you to jump forward to Ephesians chapter 2. It is going to come up on the screen behind me, but I do think it would help you to turn there in your Bible if you can. So keep a finger in 2 Samuel 19 and turn to page 1174 which we looked at with the children and we're going to just look at Ephesians chapter 2 just a bit further down that passage. Page 1174.

Let me read to you from verse 13. Paul writes this to the Ephesian church. He says, but now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far away have been brought near by, not your good works, not Jesus's conquering military power, but by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who are far away and peace to those who are near for through him we both have access to the Father by one spirit.

Now the situation as Paul writes is slightly different to 2 Samuel 19 isn't it? It's not the fighting of 10 tribes versus one tribe, it's the rivalry between Jews and Gentiles in the church in Ephesus and his concern is that they see that the glue at the center of their church, the thing that will hold them together, is not a shared cultural identity. They don't have one. It's not a shared history or a shared geography. They don't have that either. It's not a shared preference for a style of music or a preaching method, rather is a common experience of the gracious saving power of Jesus.

[27 : 58] So notice what does he say? Verse 13, the blood of Christ has brought those who are far away, he's brought them near, drawing people from all nations to the center of God's plans and purposes. Verse 14, he makes peace not just between God and people but peace between people and people and not peace as in an abstract thing but a peace from Jesus and in Jesus. He describes it in verse 14 as the removal of the dividing wall of hostility. Removed how? Well in the flesh, the body, the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 15 explains how this works because Jesus by his gracious cross does two things. He abolishes the law covenant designed to separate the Jewish nation from the world, meaning access to the spiritual heavenly eternal kingdom of God is not through joining a nation but coming to Christ.

And the other is that he makes one new humanity from Jews and Gentiles together. Not just kind of enabling them to get along with one another, but like David in 2 Samuel 19 verse 14, enabling them to be as one man with one purpose and one goal. Verse 16 summarizes it as reconciling us both to God in one body through the cross and thereby killing the hostility. Jump down to the conclusion with me.

What's the result in the church of this shared experience of the cross of Christ? Well verse 19 of Ephesians chapter 2, consequently you are no longer foreigners and strangers. You're no longer people from different nations, different backgrounds. You're no longer people who like different things and support different teams, but you are fellow citizens with God's people and members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord, and in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirits. The grace of the king is the glue of the kingdom. The graciousness of Jesus keeps the church together and that's the point of 2 Samuel chapter 19. You and I, we are, you can come back to 2 Samuel 19 now, we are a company of people like Shimei and Mephibosheth or like Amasa and Ziba. By nature we are the fighting tribes of Judah and Manasseh, always something against each other. None of us deserve to be here, do we? But the glue of the church is the grace of Jesus Christ. Now let me suggest to you that there are a whole load of implications of that for us this morning, but I just want to draw your attention to two.

The first one is this, the first implication of this is that belonging to church is really firstly about belonging to Christ. Belonging to church is really about knowing and experiencing for yourself the grace of King Jesus. The truth is you can't actually short-circuit this to belong to the church in any other way. The church is founded on every individual experiencing this grace of the Lord Jesus

Christ personally and then being brought into the community that way. So if you're a visitor here or this is your first week in church in a long time, if you think I'd love to be connected with a church, I'd love to belong here, then let me tell you this is where it starts. It doesn't start with joining a voter, it doesn't start with attending super regularly, it doesn't begin by joining in with the singing of the songs and knowing how that harmony goes in over a thousand tongues, which I don't even know. It doesn't begin like that. It begins by coming to Christ and experiencing his grace and mercy. It begins by saying, I have nothing to claim here, I have no right to belong here. I, me, I have no right to belong here. I don't belong to God's people by my own good works, but by the grace of Jesus Christ, I have nothing to bring, no rights to claim. I am an amasser and a shimmy eye who deserve the condemnation of the King, but I have found him to be full of grace and mercy. On the cross you died in my place to conquer my sin, so much so that through his grace we don't only belong to him, but we belong to one another. So let me say to you this morning, if you have never ever joined the church, let me invite you this morning to join the church. Not by signing a card, but by coming and putting your faith and trust in Jesus Christ. Come that way and belong to us by belonging to Christ. Now the second thing to say is that if that's where church membership starts, if that's where belonging to church starts, the second thing to say is this is what church unity is all about. This is how church unity continues.

[32 : 43] As a church, we protect the unity of our church by making much of the forgiving power of Jesus. We protect the unity of our church by being honest about our sin and certain of our hope in Christ.

I guess at that level, Mephibosheth, you could use Mephibosheth as a great example of what it means to be a Christian this morning. Okay, so this is what our church life is to be like. I would long that when you come to church, you can, like you could with Mephibosheth, you can smell our trust in Jesus. Not because we haven't washed, at least I hope that's not the case, right? But that you can smell the fact that these people, I don't know everything about them, but what I know about these people is that they depend on Jesus and not themselves. I can see that. It's what they sing about. It's what they pray about. When they read the Bible, that's what they talk about. When they talk with one another, that's what they discuss.

When they invite me to church and talk to me about what church belongs, that's what they say it's about. So can we smell our loyalty to Jesus? Can we smell that we belong to him and therefore belong to one another? This kind of coming to Christ should fuel our love. It should enable us to forgive each other when we make mistakes and when we hurt one another as we seek grace together. And let me say as well, at this particular point in our church life too, as we look to unite our church with another church for the sake of the work of the gospel here, we'll find, won't we, that lots of things about church change. There'll be new people here. What's going to stick that group together? This, the grace of the king, the grace of the king. It's not that we're all the same. It's not that we've all got the same background, but that we've all experienced the grace of King Jesus. And that has brought us to him and that has brought us to one another. Let me pray and then we'll sing. Heavenly Father, how we thank you that in the life of King David here, we glimpse the beauty and the wonder of your grace to us in the Lord Jesus. Thank you that through Christ, you don't treat us as we deserve, but you invite us to belong to your kingdom. That though we were far off, though we were strangers, though we've insulted you, though we've been half-hearted and looked after ourselves and not others, though we have wandered from you, yet you invite us to come back to find mercy and grace and forgiveness. I just want to pray especially for us as a company of your people this morning. We pray, please, that you might help us to find our unity in the Lord Jesus. We pray that you might join others to our church through faith in Jesus Christ. Even this morning, we pray for the sake of your glory and in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.