

2 Samuel 9, Promised love that changes everything

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- [0 : 00] 2 Samuel chapter 9, and we're going to read that passage together, and Amy is going to come and read it for us. So Amy, over to you. 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 Mekir, son of Amiel, in Lodabar.
- So king David had him brought from Lodabar, from the house of Mekir, son of Amiel. When Mehibosheth, son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honour.
- [1 : 18] David said, Mehibosheth. 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. Mehibosheth 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 Mehibosheth, grandson of your master, will always eat at my table. Now Zeba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.
- [2 : 22] Then Zeba said to the king, Your servant will do whatever my lord the king commands his servant to do. So Mehibosheth ate at David's table like one of the king's sons.
- Mehibosheth had a young son called Micah, and all the members of Zeba's household were servants of Mehibosheth. And Mehibosheth lived in Jerusalem because he always ate at the king's table.
- He was lame in both feet. Great, thank you so much, Amy. Let's just pray briefly as we come to look at God's word. Let's pray.
- Father, we pray with the psalmist, open our eyes that we may see wonderful things in your law. Teach us, Lord, the way of your decrees, that we may follow it to the end.
- Give us understanding so that we may keep your word and obey it with all our hearts. Direct us in the paths of your commands, for there we find true delight. May those words be true for us this morning, we pray, as we come to look at your word.
- [3 : 28] Amen. Amen. We'll keep that passage open. There's an outline on the inside of the welcome sheet if you want to follow along there. And the slides will be coming up behind me as well, hopefully.

If I can put it this way, the key to understanding, I think, what God would have us learn from 2 Samuel chapter 9 is not to see ourselves as the hero, but to see ourselves in the place of the weakest person in 2 Samuel chapter 9.

We love, don't we, to read stories and listen to stories as if we are the hero of them. We imagine ourselves to be Spider-Man or the rock or Storm or whoever it is.

Superhero movies are popular because we like to think that we are possible to be that superhero. You know, we would like to be better than we really are and think we're maybe only a spider's bite away from being able to climb up walls or whatever it is.

But that's not how to read 2 Samuel chapter 9. This is not Spider-Man. It's not a Marvel comic. But not only because 2 Samuel 9 is a record of historical events, but also because in 2 Samuel 9, God is teaching us that we are not David.

[4 : 42] We're not even Ziba, but you and I are like Mephibosheth. We are weak, crippled, and depending on others for help.

Now, I know that's a really hard sell this morning. It makes the message of 2 Samuel 9 the opposite of whatever else it is that you're going to hear all day. The passage is not going to be saying to you, listen, be the best that you can be and that will be enough.

It's not going to say that. It's not going to say, rely on yourself and that will be enough. It's not going to tell you that you're the captain of your soul or the master of your fate. And it's not because it's against the idea of us taking personal responsibility for our actions.

It's not that. It's not because God doesn't think that we should try our best or do our best. Actually, I think that idea belongs to Christianity. It's borrowed by our world. Rather, the point is that 2 Samuel 9 reminds us that the key to life, the key to life in this world is receiving the undeserved kindness of God.

That's the key to life. It's owning our weakness and accepting that what we really need is the undeserved kindness of a king. Now, with that in mind, let's have a think about this guy, Mephibosheth.

[5 : 55] Mephibosheth, if you've been tracking along with the story, is in a precarious position. Mephibosheth is the son of Jonathan. He is the grandson of the old king Saul.

And Ish-bosheth, the wannabe king of Israel, was his uncle. Now, in those days, to be a child from the old dynasty was by definition risky and not without reason.

So his grandfather, Saul, had been out to kill David on numerous occasions. And David is now the king of Israel. In the end, Saul was wounded in battle and fell on his sword to finish him off.

And so he is now dead. His father, Jonathan, was a good friend of David, but he also was killed in battle and he is dead. His uncle, Ish-bosheth, had tried to split Israel and take 11 tribes away from David.

He ruled a rebel group away from the new king, but it all ended badly and he was murdered in his bed by his own soldiers. So Ish-bosheth is dead as well.

[6 : 55] Now, if you are looking at that kind of family tree and seeing what's going on, by all accounts, Mephibosheth knows, doesn't he? I'm on borrowed time here. I am in the wrong family, in the wrong kingdom.

But as you read 2 Samuel chapter 9, you realise that actually it's even worse for Mephibosheth personally. Because on top of everything else, he is unable to walk.

We are told that he is crippled in his feet, verse 3. It's a reference back to 2 Samuel chapter 4, verse 4, when we're told that his nurse dropped him as a child, breaking his feet and rendering them useless for the rest of his life.

A point which gets repeated throughout the chapter, as Amy read it, you might have noticed it, almost to the point in which it makes you slightly uncomfortable. And we'll come on to look at that in a bit more detail in a moment. But just pause with me here for just a little while and think, what would it have been like to be Mephibosheth?

Can you put yourself in Mephibosheth's place? He's a child of the enemy. All your close relatives have been executed or killed in battle, even by their allies.

[7 : 58] Mephibosheth could literally trust no one in the world, could he? And also, on top of all of that, he is physically weak. He is lame at a time when that was not understood and not accommodated.

He had no one to trust, but he had to trust somebody, someone to take care of him. Mephibosheth is, in our passage, the definition of what it means to be weak and vulnerable.

I guess he would have tried to hide his identity as well. I think that's why you find him in this place called Lodibar. Everybody who knows the story about Saul and his nurse dropping him and all of that would know who Mephibosheth was.

So he was living in Lodibar in an insignificant place in the northeast of the country. Middlesbrough or something like that. He's in hiding. Now, if 2 Samuel was the Hunger Games, then Mephibosheth is the guy that they all hated, who's wounded and immobile and just waiting to be finished off.

He's a nobody. And he's lost and weak. And the big surprise of 2 Samuel 9 is that it starts off, if you look down at verse 1, with David saying, Who is there in the house of Saul that I can show kindness to for the sake of Jonathan?

[9 : 11] That the backstory to that is in 1 Samuel chapter 20. It's so important. It's worth turning to it now. If you want to turn back in your Bibles to 1 Samuel chapter 20, it will come up on the screen behind me. But what we find is that David is talking to his best friend, Jonathan.

And it's this tense conversation because he knows that David's David knows that Jonathan's father, Saul, wants to kill him. So he's asking Jonathan to help him out by finding out for sure whether that's the case.

Jonathan knows that David is going to be the next king in the place of his father. And so he asks him this. What does he say? 1 Samuel chapter 20, verse 14. But show me unfailing kindness like the Lord's kindness as long as I live so that I may not be killed.

And do not ever cut off your kindness from my family, not even when the Lord has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth. So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David saying, May the Lord call David's enemies to account.

And Jonathan and David reaffirm his oath out of love for him because he loved him as he loved himself. There they are. They're making a promise to one another. Jonathan is asking David to make a promise to love him and his family after him.

[10 : 22] And back in 2 Samuel chapter 9, David is keeping that promise. He's looking for someone from Jonathan's family so that he can show them kindness. So he calls a guy called Ziba, who is Saul's former servant, and they ask him.

And he knows about Mephibosheth and knows where he is and calls him so that in verse 5, Mephibosheth is collected and brought to the king. Now, I don't know. The story doesn't tell us. But I can imagine that at this point, Mephibosheth is terrified.

I mean, imagine. You know who you are. You know where you're from. You've been hiding away as the grandson of the wrong king. You've seen enough of history documentaries to know that when the new family takes over the kingdom, all of those from the old family are destined to die.

And now the king has called you into his presence. Ah, you must be thinking. Ziba has blown your cover. And now you are called into the presence of King David.

David. So in verse 6, when Mephibosheth falls flat on his face and pays homage in front of David, it's no surprise, is it? He calls himself David's servant. All of that makes sense. But it's what comes next that's going to be the surprise for Mephibosheth.

[11 : 29] Look down at verse 7. This verse 7 is the heart of the whole story. The passage is designed around verse 7. Let me try and show you that so that you can see it. The way the writer has put his material together puts verse 7 right at the center of what's going on.

So before verse 7 and after verse 7 come Mephibosheth's responses to David. In verse 6 and verse 8, you see him responding to David.

Then outside of that, it's a guy called Ziba, the servant of Saul. He is talking to David. Then in a circle outside of that is David's intention to keep his promise to David by showing kindness.

So everything that the author is doing is zooming you in on verse 7. And look at verse 7. Don't be afraid, David says 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. Put yourself in Mephibosheth's place and that's amazing news, isn't it? Through no merit of his own, only because of a promise made to David well before Mephibosheth was on the scene.

[12 : 34] Mephibosheth doesn't just get to live. Instead, he gets his land back and he gets Ziba employed as a servant to take care of it. While he himself lives in the palace and eats with the king.

You know, the hideaway cripple living in fear of his life has become the king's son. Living in the palace with a steady income from the land being worked on his behalf by servant Ziba.

The last couple of verses summarize it, don't they? Look down at verse 11, just partway through the verse there. So Mephibosheth ate at David's table like one of the king's sons. Mephibosheth had a young son named Mika and all the members of Ziba's household were servants of Mephibosheth.

And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem because he always ate at the king's table. He was laying in both feet. I want you to try and just feel the drama of the story if you can for a moment.

This transformation that happens for Mephibosheth, poor, hiding and helpless, yet shown incredible kindness and mercy. He's provided for and welcomed so that the one who is in hiding is now welcomed.

[13 : 41] The one who was eating alone in the dust is now eating at the king's table. It's an awesome story. But let me show you that it's even better than just a story of a king being kind, because notice how David's generosity is framed here.

Look at the word that's used. It comes three times. It's there in verse one. To whom can I show? The word is kindness. It's repeated in verse three. To whom can I show God's kindness? Again in verse seven.

Don't be afraid for I will show you kindness. Now kindness in English language is a bit of a weak word, isn't it? Even be kind. It's what parents say to their children.

But in the Bible language, it's an important word. It's the Hebrew word *hesed* here, which is often translated steadfast love or loving kindness. It's a particularly important kind of love. It's a promised love, a covenant love.

It's a love which is not about gooey feelings, which is how we often define love. But it's a love which is about commitment. It's a proper love. It's a love which keeps its promises. It's a love that's real, a love that perseveres even when it's difficult because it's rooted in a commitment, not in a feeling.

[14 : 48] And that commitment here, that promise was the promise made to Jonathan way back in 1 Samuel 20. And that promise, that hesed promise of love now means that Mephibosheth gets to sit at the king's table as David acts with loving kindness rooted in the promise.

Now, if you look at verse 3, you'll notice that this hesed, this kindness of David has a particular source. It's God's hesed, he says. In other words, David is not unconsciously doing this.

He is self-consciously behaving towards Mephibosheth in the way that God has behaved towards him. David has received hesed, loving kindness from God.

And he is now showing it to Mephibosheth, the kindness of God. Let me say this is a bit of an aside really here. But let me say this is one reason why the Bible takes marriage really seriously.

Have you thought about that? Perhaps you've wondered, why is the Bible so hung up on marriage? Why does the Bible instruct Christians to only marry Christians, to restrict sex for marriage, and tell Christians that divorce is serious and to be avoided?

[15 : 53] Well, it is because love in the Bible is this kind of love. It's not a passionate feeling of desire, but love in the Bible is a God-like lifelong commitment of a promise.

A promise that outlasts the feelings of desires. It smooths over the lumps and bumps. A love like that is a God-like love. We have received hesed from God and we show it to others.

And that's how David loves here. And back in 2 Samuel 9, this hesed love of David for Mephibosheth brings to light what I think is the intention of this whole story, which is that you and I see that in Bible terms, we are God's Mephibosheths.

It's us. You know, think about it. The similarities are obvious. Before God, our position is as precarious and flimsy as Mephibosheth's. We too are from an enemy family, aren't we?

We live for the wrong king. We do what we want instead of what God wants. We walk away from him, not towards him. And we come from a generation of that, from a human race that has done that ever since Adam and Eve.

[17 : 05] Giving God just as much passing attention as we think will give us a free pass on judgment day, but not so much that we can honestly say that we live for him. I think if you like to put it this way, we hide away, don't we, in spiritual low D bars.

We think, well, no one will find us here. Our family tree is bleak and full of death. Children of a dead king and a dying humanity, which consistently shows this is not our place and sin has no future.

On top of all that, we're not just crippled in our feet, are we? Spiritually, we're described as being dead. Ephesians 2 says that we are dead in our trespasses and sins.

We're not just unable to move towards God, but we are without any impulse to do it. Now listen, if you are understanding what I'm saying here, it's going to be a bit uncomfortable.

All this kind of talk of our weakness and our sinfulness is not easy to listen to. It's not actually that easy for me to say either. You know, we think, don't we, in our modern speak, that this kind of language ruins our self-esteem.

[18 : 04] Oh, don't tell me that. Oh, don't tell my children that I'm a sinner or that they're sinners. It will ruin them. You know, we live in a world where we are encouraged to tell ourselves every day how brilliant we are.

But the Bible's point in confronting us with this dire assessment of our spiritual state is not because it wants to ruin us, but because it wants to show us the remedy in Christ. Maybe this is just me, but I tend to think that we approach the Bible like it's a self-help manual, don't you?

You know, you read the Bible and you're looking for a verse that will kind of lift you up or spur you on. You know, moral guidance and tips maybe for knowing God. But it's not like that. The way to read God's word really, in some ways, is as a medical assessment.

You go to the doctors and you have a test and you receive the results. And that's in some ways what God's word is. And it is a devastating diagnosis, a devastating diagnosis.

But it is given to you by the one who has the cure. So God this morning calls us spiritual Mephibosheths hiding in low debar.

[19 : 11] And he calls us into his presence. The Lord Jesus, the real king in David's line, calls us into his presence this morning. What does he do? What does he say? He says, listen, there is an ancient promise for me to show you loving kindness.

And it's not just that he's going to share a bit of his food with us, but he's going to share himself with us. The Lord Jesus, sent in the likeness of sinful humanity to purchase forgiveness and righteousness through his death on a cross.

He calls us to himself and says, come, sit at my table like my son and my daughter, restoring to us the place that he has made for us, his kingdom of goodness and grace.

What is the source of all this goodness that we're invited to, to enjoy? Where does it all come from? What is the basis of this? Hesed. Steadfast love of God himself based on an ancient promise.

Relied on and built upon for thousands of years. Saving people from every tribe and language and nation. Saving the unworthy and the undeserving from every corner of the globe. That's what's going on in 2 Samuel chapter 9.

[20 : 18] David shows Hesed to Mephibosheth. As a witness to the fact that God shows hesed to you. Let me give you three implications of this story for us this morning.

The first one is this. Joy. Joy. It's worth looking closely at how Mephibosheth talks in verse 8. Look at what he says. What is your servant that you should notice a dead dog like me?

In a bulk, don't we, Mephibosheth's language. We're encouraged, I think, rightly to see people's identity not in their disabilities, but to see the person who is no more or less valuable than any other person made in the image of God.

People matter, don't they? Whoever they are and whatever they're capable of. And that's right. Actually, David here is being very countercultural in his approach to disability. He's giving a dignity to Mephibosheth that would have been very surprising.

But the offensiveness of the way Mephibosheth describes his disability is pointing to a very important point. Mephibosheth knew that he was in his culture and his time a dead dog.

[21 : 18] He couldn't be a king. He couldn't lead an army into battle. He couldn't hold the hand of his son and teach him to walk. He couldn't work. He couldn't provide for himself. He couldn't provide for others. He was, by definition, a burden, an unholy burden, as his culture saw him.

But the wonder of the story is because King David, at a time when kings wanted beautiful and strong people sitting at their table, adopts the crippled Mephibosheth and has him sit at his table.

In Isaiah and Jeremiah, you're told that that's what the Messiah will be like. Takes the lame and the crippled and makes them leap for joy. That's what Jesus does. Taking what the world looks at as despised and unlovely and unworthy and reaches out and restores.

And because of that, Mephibosheth's joy in verse 8 is not by pretending that he's not lame. He's not trying to imagine that David saw past his crippled feet to some inner beauty. The point is that Mephibosheth's joy is that David's loving kindness seats dead dogs at his table.

That's what it does. That's his joy. And so for us this morning, our joy as Christians doesn't come from us trying to pretend that we are less sinful and broken than we really are.

[22 : 29] Or trying to dress ourselves up with nice words. The truth is that you and I are spiritual dead dogs. People who are so sinful and so broken that we struggle even to love ourselves.

But the truth is that God loves us with a hesed promised love. Not with gooey feelings of romantic love that we're so obsessed with, but with an unshakable covenant for the undeserving.

And seeing that combination, our dead dogness and his hesed love for dead dogs like us, gives us joy. Joy. Joy. Because we know that God sees the worst of us and still seats us at his table.

Let me try and say it like this to try and make the point this morning. I think some of us are miserable Christians. Some of us have very little joy because we never engage with how undeservingly brilliant the gospel is.

Either we see our sin but stop short of seeing God's love for sinners. So we just think we're terrible people and we don't imagine that God could love us. Or we kind of forget our unworthiness and imagine that God's done quite a good job of getting us on his team.

[23 : 38] But those thoughts are not only wrong, but they are thoughts that make you miserable. Miserable. Because the truth is if you're a Christian this morning, God heseds you in Christ.

He is drawn to you, crippled and blind and sinning and sinned against as you are. You know, the key to joy in the Christian life is not to tell yourself that you're brilliant, but to realise that God loves you.

Even you as a sinner. Even me. You know, we sing with joy with John Newton. We're going to sing this in a minute. I was, I was once was lost, but now I'm found. Was blind, but now I see.

That's the joy of the Christian life, isn't it? The second implication here is confidence. Now stay with me. I know you're running out of energy, but stay with me for a moment. I think Mephibosheth is and isn't like us in the story.

Because the story is way, our story is way better than Mephibosheth's. You know, Mephibosheth, notice at the end of the passage, he's seated at the table of the king, but what? He's still lame, isn't he? David's love is able to sit him at his table, but it is not able to change Mephibosheth in any kind of meaningful way.

[24 : 45] But God's hesed love for us in the Lord Jesus Christ is not like that. So David's steadfast love is a shadow of God's love. But if you like, it's a pale shadow of God's love. While David invites Mephibosheth to come and eat with him, God in his covenant love and kindness comes and eats with us.

Yeah. So not only do we get to dwell with God eternally, but before then, God comes to dwell with us internally. Understand? God by the Spirit comes and makes his home with us.

So that God doesn't only treat us like sons and daughters, he actually makes us into sons and daughters by coming to dwell in us by the Spirit. He doesn't leave us in the lameness of our sin, but he transforms us to live lives that please him and give him glory.

So much so that our confidence for the future, our hope for security comes not from digging into our own loveliness, our own strength, not wondering if we can make ourselves fit for God, but knowing that God in his hesed loving Christ has come to dwell in me by his Spirit now, today.

So that I'm invited to come to him to sit at his table because he has come to live in me. Which brings us confidence. Isn't it? Confidence. Confidence. Now where does confident Christianity work out?

[26 : 03] Where do you see and experience confident Christianity? Let me tell you, I think you see it in the gathering of the local church in coming here. Imagine the story went like this.

Mephibosheth gets called into David's presence. David says, listen, because of a promise I made to your father before you were around, because of that promise, I'm going to show you kindness, even though you don't deserve it.

Mephibosheth thinks for a minute, goes, oh, that's wonderful. That's wonderful. I've been eating dirt in Lodibar, and now you're offering me a place at the table of the finest food in all the kingdom. Ah, but no, not really bothered, thank you.

I'm going to go back to Lodibar. Or, you know, maybe I'll turn up every now and again. You'd think he was insane, wouldn't you? You'd think he was insane. But actually, that's often what people do, isn't it, spiritually? The gathering of the local church is the opportunity for us to express what it is to be called by God into his presence, to eat at his table with one another.

Don't neglect coming here, because this is where we get confident Christianity. I get a seat at the table. I get to know Christ as my Lord and Savior.

[27 : 12] I get to experience his hesed and dwelling in me by his spirit. So I'm coming to express that in the gathering of the local church. The final implication is faith.

Faith. The interesting thing in the story is that Mephibosheth, all he has to do to take his seat at the table is to trust, isn't it? He just has to take David at his word. Believe that he's going to keep his promise to Jonathan.

Have faith in David's faithfulness to his promise. That's all there is. Actually, there's a twist in the story in a few chapters. If you stay with us in the series in 2 Samuel, David gets turned out of Jerusalem by his son Absalom.

And it turns out that Mephibosheth thinks he might get the kingdom back. We'll find that out in weeks to come. But the point is that Mephibosheth is safe as long as he trusts David's promise. So for us, you will not benefit from the kindness of God unless you trust in the promise of God.

You will not be safe if you do not receive by faith what God is offering you by grace. Faith is not a work, is it? It's just the hand that receives the grace that God offers. Some of you have heard this promise time and time again.

[28 : 18] In a way, you've benefited from it by being around church. But the truth is you've never opened the hand of faith to receive it for yourself. You must do that. You must do that. You must acknowledge, mustn't you, that by nature you're a spiritual Mephibosheth.

Mephibosheth. I am a spiritual Mephibosheth. I am precariously balanced in the wrong kingdom. Let me encourage you this morning to hear this news of a kind king and to put your faith in him, even this morning.

To come and take your seat at the table of the king. King Jesus himself, the one who loved you and gave himself up for you. That you might be saved. Let's pray.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you that not only have you seated us at the table of the Lord Jesus and promised us a place in glory, but that by your spirit you have come to dwell in us now.

Thank you that we can say not only that you treat us like your children, but that you have adopted us as your children. Thank you that in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have all the great benefits of the gospel, of being yours, belonging to you.

[29 : 56] Oh, Lord, we pray. Help us by faith to grasp that great promise. Help us by faith to grasp that great promise. And help us to live confident Christian lives, gathering together with great joy to remember what you've done for us and how you've loved us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Pray, please, Lord, that these things might always be precious to us as we pray in Jesus name. Amen. Amen.