

You Shall Eat at My Table Always
2 Samuel 9
August 13, 2023
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CenterPoint Church

Read 2 Samuel 9

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Matt. 4:4b)

Introduction

One of Shakespeare's lesser-known works is *The Merchant of Venice*. In Act 4 (there are always 5 acts in Shakespeare's plays, so just about 2/3rd of the way through), there is a character named Portia who disguises herself as a lawyer to plead with another character, Shylock. Shylock has lent money to Antonio, who cannot pay it back, so he is planning to take it from him with violence because he has a grudge against him. Portia does not want that to happen, so she gives this speech:

"The quality of mercy is not strain'd. It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest: It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes the thronèd monarch better than his crown.
His scepter shows the force of temporal power, the attribute to awe and majesty
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings; but mercy is above this scepter'd sway.
It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings; It is an attribute to God Himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's when mercy seasons justice."¹

If you're like me and you sometimes have to read the words of Shakespeare multiple times to understand what he's saying, the gist of that speech was: "For mercy to be truly mercy, it must be freely given. It blesses both the giver and the receiver. Mercy makes a king look better than his crown does, and makes people more in awe of him. It is an attribute that God himself exercises, and kings are most God-like when they give it." Spoiler alert: the speech doesn't really work on the moneylender, but Antonio is spared anyways through a legal technicality.

Our passage this morning teaches us about the mercy of God and kings. But there is no Portia in the story lobbying the one in power to exercise mercy, it is a gift that he decides on his own to give. It is not earned or deserved, the recipient has no claim on it or power to demand it; and he cannot protect himself if it is withheld. It's a story that will show us our own desperate spiritual condition and remind us how amazing the kindness and mercy of God really is.

As we come to this chapter, we have jumped a bit forward in David's reign, most likely over halfway through his forty-year reign. We'll go back next week and fill in several of the events that we've skipped. The first four verses of the chapter are a scene in the palace where

I. An Enemy Was Sought Out (vv. 1-4)

¹ And David said, "Is there still 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 And the king said, "Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God to him?" Ziba said to the king, "There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in his feet." ⁴ The king said to him, "Where is he?" And Ziba said to the king, "He is in the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar."

¹ <https://www.folger.edu/explore/shakespeares-works/the-merchant-of-venice/read/>

This is not the first time that we've heard of Jonathan's son. We were introduced to him very quickly in 2 Samuel 4:4: "*Jonathan, the son of Saul, had a son who was crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel, and his nurse took him up and fled, and as she fled in her haste, he fell and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth.*" With no modern medicine available to treat his injuries, Mephibosheth was crippled for life after his nurse dropped him as a five-year-old. We find out at the end of this chapter that he has a son, so he was at least in his twenties. So he had lived for several decades not only with legs that didn't work, but also in hiding, far away from the palace. The knowledge of his existence was kept hidden from David. The fear, of course, was that David would be like most kings who put the entire bloodline, the descendants of the last king, to the sword so that no one could challenge his own kingship. Anyone who heard David's inquiry into whether there was anyone left of Saul's house to show kindness to might have suspected it was a ploy, a ruse, to flush anyone else left out of hiding so that they could be eliminated.

But if they thought that, they did not know David well. Even when Saul hunted him and threatened his life, David never took the opportunities presented to him to hurt Saul. And he never moved against Ishbosheth, Saul's son, even when he set up a rival kingship. David never had, and never would, hurt the royal family. But you never can be too careful, right? So, Mephibosheth's guardians kept his survival a secret and kept him far from the palace. But David wanted to show kindness to Jonathan's children. David didn't ask, 'Is there anyone qualified?' Or, 'Is there anyone worthy?' He said, 'Is there anyone? Regardless of who they are, is there ANYBODY still living to whom I can show kindness?'² Actually, the translation "*that I may show the kindness of God to him*" is a bit weak. To our ears, kindness can just sound like when someone lets you cut the line at the grocery store or when someone pays for your meal or compliments your clothes. It's nice, but not that big a deal. But the Hebrew word is *hesed* – I've talked about that in other sermons; it's a rich, beautiful word that means an undeserved, unfailing, covenant lovingkindness.

So Ziba, who had served King Saul and knew of Mephibosheth's existence, let David know where he could find Jonathan's son. The next four verses bring the man forward who was

II. To Be Shown Lovingkindness (vv. 5-8)

⁵ Then King David sent and brought him from the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar.

⁶ And Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, son of Saul, came to David and fell on his face and paid homage. And David said, "Mephibosheth!" And he answered, "Behold, I am your servant." ⁷ And David said to him, "Do not fear, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan, and I will restore to you all the land of Saul your father, and you shall eat at my table always." ⁸ And he paid homage and said, "What is your servant, that you should show regard for a dead dog such as I?"

Mephibosheth was brought up from Lo-debar – "lo" in Hebrew means "no" and "debar" means pastureland, so he was living in non-pasture land, in other words, somewhere desolate.³ Eugene Peterson imagines that Mephibosheth had always been told that David was responsible for his difficult lot in life:

"It was because of David that Mephibosheth's father and grandfather had been killed by the Philistines. If it hadn't been for David, there would have been no accident and no lifelong crippling disability. It was David's fault that they were living in faceless and miserable

² Charles Swindoll, *David: A Man of Passion & Destiny* (Dallas: Word, 1997), p. 171.

³ Swindoll, pp. 172-73.

obscurity in Lo-debar. From the age of five, Mephibosheth grew up on these embittering David stories, stories in which David was cast as scapegoat and villain.”⁴

That’s very possible, but I don’t see any evidence of it in this story. What seems more likely is that Mephibosheth has always lived in fear of David and of being found and killed for his connection to David’s tormentor, his grandfather, Saul. He has plenty of reasons to think that David will have him killed, and since he can’t fight or run away, he is at the king’s mercy. But Mephibosheth didn’t know until now was that David was a very different king from his grandfather. The last chapter (8:15) had ended with the comment that “*So David reigned over all Israel. And David administered justice and equity to all his people.*” And he probably did not know that David and his father, Jonathan, had made a covenant of loyalty to one another, and that Jonathan had asked David to extend that covenant loyalty to his descendants in 1 Samuel 20:15: “*and do not cut off your (hesed) steadfast love from my house forever, when the Lord cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth.*” We’re going to talk more about covenants next week, but a covenant was the deepest way that you could make a promise back then.

At this point in his reign, David had secured his borders, beat back his enemies, established his kingdom and his capital city, and was living in royal prosperity. So now he was looking to make good on that covenant promise he had made. His very first word of address to him is to use his name. Mephibosheth’s name means “seething dishonor” or “one who scatters shame,” but David took away any dishonor or shame from him.⁵ And then he said, “*do not fear. I brought you here to bless you not hurt you. I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan.*” And he gave Mephibosheth two things: land to live on and a place at his royal table.

And Mephibosheth responded with humility and incredulity: “Why me? I’m a nobody, a dead dog.” I wonder if there were advisors to David, maybe even his own children, who were also a little incredulous: “Ah, David, I think it’s really magnanimous of you to pardon this guy, but why don’t you just leave it at that? Don’t kill him and you’ve shown yourself to be extremely merciful after all you suffered from Saul’s hand; and that’s more than enough to fulfill your word to his father. But you want to give him land and have him eating with you all the time? That’s a little crazy for someone who hasn’t earned anything. Not to mention that if anybody gets any ideas of overthrowing you as king, they’ll have a legitimate heir to the throne sitting right there.” There’s no evidence that anyone said anything like this, but you can imagine people in the palace thinking that. David didn’t have to explain himself to anyone, though. The only rationale he gave was, “*for the sake of Jonathan.*” He didn’t just tolerate Mephibosheth’s existence, he didn’t just tell him that he could keep his life and continue living in Lo-debar. No, David honored and restored Mephibosheth, bringing him back to his place of royalty in the palace, letting him eat at the same table that the royal children ate at, and giving him his grandfather’s lands, most likely a large tract of land that David certainly could have given to any of his sons.

David sealed the deal in the last five verses, showing how Mephibosheth was thoroughly

III. (And) Treated Like a Son (vv. 9-13)

⁹ *Then the king called Ziba, Saul's servant, and said to him, "All that belonged to Saul and to all his house I have given to your master's grandson. ¹⁰ And you and your sons and your servants shall till the land for him and shall bring in the produce, that your master's grandson may have bread to eat. But Mephibosheth your master's grandson shall always eat at my table."* Now Ziba had fifteen sons and

⁴ Eugene Peterson, *Leap Over A Wall* (New York: HarperOne, 1998), p. 171.

⁵ Tim Chester, *2 Samuel for You* (England: The Good Book, 2017), p. 84.

twenty servants. ¹¹ Then Ziba said to the king, "According to all that my lord the king commands his servant, so will your servant do." So Mephibosheth ate at David's table, like one of the king's sons. ¹² And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Mica. And all who lived in Ziba's house became Mephibosheth's servants. ¹³ So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, for he ate always at the king's table. Now he was lame in both his feet.

This last section shows that David did not just vaguely hope that Mephibosheth would live long and prosper, but that he made plans and set things in place for him to have people to work the land for him. This may seem like an unnecessary detail, but Mephibosheth was still lame in both feet, and he now had an estate to rule over, but no ability to till the land himself. For David to assign a team of workers for the estate made sure that it would run efficiently. And notice that David appealed to Ziba based on his loyalty to Saul – he mentioned three times "*your master's grandson*," with the master being Saul. What an interesting way to phrase things, since most kings would have assumed the title of master and banned any talk or reference to the old king, but David still honored Saul and asked Ziba to honor him as well by talking care of his grandson.

This chapter answers the question: "What kind of king would David be?" Would he be the scheming, manipulative kind? Would he be paranoid like his predecessor or power-hungry like the neighboring kings? We've seen that he was remarkably patient and forgiving with Saul, but we've also seen that he was ready to "go scorched earth" and murder an entire household when a landowner named Nabal insulted him. We have an answer from this story: David would be the kind of king who would look to honor others, not alienate and dominate them. All kinds of people would be welcome at his table, and rather than make enemies where they didn't need to be, he extended his royal generosity. David will not be perfect, he'll fall far short, but at least here, he was a man after God's own heart.

Conclusion

What do we learn from this chapter? Even though we are not royalty or leaders of countries, we can imitate David's love and thoughtfulness in our own lives. The very first thing we see is that he kept his promises, no matter how many decades old they were. If you have made a commitment to someone, even if they are dead and gone, honor it, no matter how much it costs you. And even as you are looking to build your own house and accomplish things in life, don't do those things at the expense of others. Look for ways to use your material blessings and your position in life to bless others, especially those in need who cannot help themselves. And finally, you'll never go wrong in extending mercy and forgiveness. Even when you might feel justified in withholding it or striking back, remember that mercy blesses both "him that gives and him that takes."

But even deeper than just imitating these good qualities of David, I believe that Mephibosheth is a picture of each one of us, actually of all humanity. Think about the parallels:

- In the beginning of creation, Adam and Eve enjoyed uninterrupted fellowship with their King in the Garden of Eden, just as Mephibosheth spent his first few years in Saul's palace in a privileged place as the grandson of the king.
- But then disaster struck leaving them crippled. For Adam and Eve it was their fall into sin, for which they permanently crippled all of humanity. For Mephibosheth, he was crippled as the news of his father and grandfather's death were announced.
- Next comes hiding – Adam and Eve hid from God because they were wracked with guilt, Mephibosheth lived in fear hiding from the new king.
- But then came restoration, the king sought out those who thought that they were his enemies and gave them new life. God went to Adam and Eve and covered their nakedness and gave

them a new covenant of mercy to replace the covenant of works that they broke. David lavished blessings on Jonathan's son and covered his shame with royal honor.

My three sermon points this morning spell out a sentence that is essentially the thesis of the sermon: "An enemy was sought out to be shown lovingkindness and treated like a son." It is a sentence that applies to both Jonathan's son and to you and me. The king of Israel gave mercy that was a reflection of the King of King's great mercy. Romans 5:6-10 tell us:

"⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die - ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life."

I love the story of Mephibosheth so much because it is my story, it is your story if you are a believer, and it can be anyone's story who will embrace it. Mephibosheth did not deserve David's *hesed* lovingkindness. He was part of the household of his enemy and he had nothing to give David. But David loved him anyway. David's greatest Son—the Lord Jesus Christ—did this in an even greater way, loving His enemies enough to die for them. "David lifted up Mephibosheth out of a great love for Jonathan, while our Father lifts us up on account of His great love for His one and only Son. Our Creator has given us to Christ Jesus as a gift, as a sure proof that His labors on the cross were not in vain, having purchased a people that are His forever."⁶

I am adopted into Jesus' family and treated as a son because of the grace that He extended to me when I did not deserve it. I should have been sentenced to death as His enemy, but instead He laid down His life for me. He extended to me *hesed* covenant love that I didn't deserve or earn. And He doesn't just pardon me and take away the death sentence that was hanging over me, He promises that I will eat from His table forever! We just sang it: "Once your enemy, now seated at Your table, Jesus, thank You!"

- ➔ Transition to Communion: In Jesus' parable of the great banquet in Luke chapter 14, we see that "the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame" are invited to eat the king's great feast. And so it is with the kingdom of heaven. We who have been crippled and blinded by our sin don't have to hide in fear of judgment anymore. We can come boldly because we have been adopted into God's family, treated like sons and daughters of the king instead of like enemies.

Benediction

Philippians 2:5-8 - "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

⁶ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/unworthy-table>