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DAVID’S KINDNESS TO MEPHIBOSHETH

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Introduction: We have in II Samuel Chapter 9 one of the loveliest scenes in the life of David. We see him returning good for evil and performing such a gracious act as to remind us of the grace of God. To properly appreciate his gracious act we must look at the dark background of his earlier experiences.

As a lad, when Saul was king of Israel, David visited the army of Saul and killed the giant Goliath who had repeatedly challenged the men of Saul’s army.

When David won the victory over Goliath, I Samuel 18:1-3, *“And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father’s house. Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul.”* And it was while living there that the king’s jealousy was aroused.

Verses 6-8, *“And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of musick. And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands. And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom? And Saul eyed David from that day and forward.”*

And repeatedly sought to take his life.

Verses 12, 14-15, *“And Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with him, and was departed from Saul...And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the LORD was with him. Wherefore when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him.”* The people were so fond of David that Saul had to resort to treachery to get rid of him.

Verses 17-28, *“And Saul said to David, Behold my elder daughter Merab, her will I give thee to wife: only be thou valiant for me, and fight the LORD’s battles. For Saul said, Let not mine hand be upon him, but let the hand of the Philistines be upon him. And David said unto Saul, Who am I? and what is my life, or my father’s family in Israel, that I should be son in law to the king? But it came to pass at the time when Merab Saul’s daughter should have been given to David, that she was given unto Adriel the Meholathite to wife. And Michal Saul’s daughter loved David: and they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. And Saul said, I will give him her, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him. Wherefore Saul said to David, Thou shalt this day be my son in law in the one of the twain. And Saul commanded his servants, saying, Commune with David secretly, and say, Behold, the king hath delight in thee, and all his servants love thee: now therefore be the king’s son in law. And Saul’s*

servants spake those words in the ears of David. And David said, Seemeth it to you a light thing to be a king’s son in law, seeing that I am a poor man, and lightly esteemed? And the servants of Saul told him, saying, On this manner spake David. And Saul said, Thus shall ye say to David, The king desireth not any dowry, but an hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to be avenged of the King’s enemies. But Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines. And when his servants told David these words, it pleased David well to be the king’s son in law: and the days were not expired. Wherefore David arose and went, he and his men, and slew of the Philistines two hundred men; and David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full tale to the king, that he might be the king’s son in law. And Saul gave him Michal his daughter to wife.” But Michal loved David and was not a snare but a great help and comfort to him.

Saul’s anger against David was increased and David finally had to flee for his life. I Samuel 19:10, *“And Saul sought to smite David even to the wall with the javelin; but he slipped away out of Saul’s presence, and he smote the javelin into the wall: and David fled, and escaped that night.”* And for years David was a fugitive from Saul’s murderous hate. But the table was finally turned and things became greatly altered.

Saul and his sons were slain in battle. I Samuel 31:5-6, *“And when his armour-*

He did not inquire if any were left that he might seek vengeance against the house of his enemy, but that he might show them the

bearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise upon his sword, and died with him. So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armourbearer, and all his men, that same day together."

II Samuel 5:3-5, "So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and king David made a league with them in Hebron before the LORD: and they anointed David king over Israel. David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months: and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three years over all Israel and Judah."

And one of the first things he did was to inquire into the condition of his enemy's family to see if any member of the family was still living that he might show him kindness. This is in striking contrast with the usual procedure of men who triumph over their foes. It is usual for them to purge the house of their foes and use their power tyrannically and maliciously. We have examples of such tyranny in ancient and modern rulers. Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin, when they reached power eliminated every vestige of opposition and killed men by the hundreds.

But the first act of David was benevolence towards the house of Saul. We find him returning good for evil, extending pity to the descendent of his foe, and befriending one who might well have feared death at his hands.

II Samuel 9:1, "And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" Look at the pathos in this question. I Chronicles 8:33 gives us a list of Saul's sons in years gone by, but now his family had been so reduced by the judgments of God that inquiry has to be made, "...Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul..." This is an illustration of how the sins of the father are visited upon the children. Oh that more parents would take this to heart.

Next, look at the benevolent design of David. He did not inquire if any were left that he might seek vengeance against the house of his enemy, but that he might show them the kindness of God.

It seems that none of David's courtiers knew anything about these descendents of Saul. None of them knew whether Saul had any descendent living. I imagine they supposed them all dead. But David kept asking. It was no mere whim which actuated him. Jonathan was ever before him and for his sake David was determined to show kindness. Finally they found an old servant of Saul's by name of Ziba who knew well the sad state of Saul's house, and David put the question to him, "...Is there yet any left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake?"

We have here the grace of God foreshadowed in David's conduct. David as the monarch of Israel suggests to us God on His throne. David showing kindness to the family of his arch-enemy reminds us of God's dealings in grace with sinners. The name of the one whom David befriended, the place he once occupied, the sad state he was now in, and the wondrous blessing he received, all typify the case of the poor sinner saved by the grace of God.

Here is a cluster of several blessed truths:

1. David took the initiative in the matter. Nobody had even suggested that he remember with kindness any member of the house of Saul. And no member of Saul's house approached him and begged for mercy. And it was like this in God's grace towards sinners. God always takes the initiative. He finds them that seek him not. All we like sheep have gone astray, and a sheep left to himself wanders farther and farther from the fold. And so it is with sinners. It was God who sought Abram in Ur; it was God who sought Jacob at Bethel; Moses at Midian, Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus. And if you are saved it was God who sought you while you were wandering in sin.

2. We notice the object of David's search. It was not one who has befriended him in his dire need. It was not one whom men of the world would call a deserving case. Nor was it one from whom David would expect anything in return. Instead it was one descended from his most implacable foe; it was one who was hiding from him; one who had nothing of

his own with which he could reward David. How accurate is the picture! God's salvation is for worthless people, spiritual paupers, members of the human family who have hated him, and who are hiding from him. God's salvation is for lost and undone sinners, and it is given without money and without price.

3. Let us look at the motive which actuated David. "...Is there yet any left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" It was for Jonathan's sake that David wished to befriend a worthless member of Saul's house. It was not for anything in the survivor of Saul that moved him to act thus. There was nothing in Saul's grandson to commend him to David. David found a reason in Jonathan. And it is thus when God saves a sinner. There is nothing in sinners to commend them to God. God forgives sinners for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ. Ephesians 4:32, "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." It is for the sake of Jesus that God is gracious to sinners.

4. Something else we need to see. Why was David so desirous to do something for Jonathan's sake? We have to go back deep into the history to find out. Jonathan loved David as his own soul and had acted as the part of a mediator between Saul and David. And Jonathan had David enter into a solemn covenant with him in which David solemnly swore to show kindness to the house of Saul. I Samuel 20:16-17,42, "So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, Let the LORD even require it at the hand of David's enemies. And Jonathan caused David to swear again, because he loved him: for he loved him as he loved his own soul...And Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the LORD, saying, The LORD be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever..." So the kindness David showed for Jonathan's sake was covenant kindness. David remembered his promise to Jonathan when he swear to show kindness to his father's house forever.

And so God's kindness in saving sin-

ners is covenant kindness. God entered into a covenant of grace with His Son Jesus Christ back before the world was. Jesus is called the Surety of a better covenant. And in saving and keeping sinners God is keeping his promise to His Son. God saves according to a purpose. II Timothy 1:9, *“Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.”* Romans 8:28, *“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”* And God keeps according to His covenant promise made to His Son. Psalm 89:3-4, *“I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations. Selah.”* Psalm 89:27-36, *“Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven. If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me.”*

Let us look more closely at the one to whom David showed the kindness of God.

First, his name, Mephibosheth, which means “a shameful thing.” And is that not true of the natural man. We are all as an unclean thing. By birth and practice we are polluted by sin and filthy to the holy eyes of God. Moral filth is not as easily discerned by us as it is by God. We abhor physical filth, but moral filth is not so bad to us as it ought to be. We might truly say with Job, I am vile.

Second, Mephibosheth was a fugitive from David. When news reached the

family of Saul that he and his sons had been slain in battle and the David had ascended the throne, Mephibosheth was but a baby and his nurse fled with him in terror. They were anxious to keep out of David’s way. And so it is with the sinner. He is a fugitive from God. He wants to keep out of God’s way. He does not want to be reminded of God. This is the reason lost men will hardly come to church. They do not want to be brought face to face with God in song and sermon.

Third, Mephibosheth was a cripple. He was lame on both feet. He had experienced a fall. When his nurse fled with him as a five year old baby she dropped him and crippled him. And this is the natural man’s condition. He has had a fall. He is a spiritual cripple. He cannot walk in God’s commandments. He cannot please God. He cannot even come to Christ. He has to be drawn by the Spirit.

Fourth, the place where Mephibosheth lived. It was not at Jerusalem, which means the foundation of peace. And the Bible says there is no peace saith my God to the wicked. Mephibosheth dwelt at Lodebar, which signifies “the place of no pasture.” Surely the parallels between Mephibosheth and the lost sinner have not been drawn by a human artist. The sinner is in this world, the place of no pasture, a dry and thirsty land where no water is. This world provides no food for the sinner, nothing to satisfy the thirst of his soul. This world is a great howling wilderness so far as any soul provisions are concerned.

Lo-debar is written across all the various fields of this world, though the great masses do not realize it. The masses are seeking to find something to fill the void; the mighty place in their heart that God should occupy. Men seek satisfaction in sport, in vile literature, and an endless round of pleasures, in making money, in fame – but soul satisfaction is not to be found in these things.

Fifth, The provision David made for Mephibosheth. Look at the two in contrast. Here was a poor cripple, belonging to a family in rebellion against David, lame on both feet, and dwelling as a fugitive in the place of no pasture. And there was the king upon his throne, with no

obligation toward the poor cripple, but with purpose of heart to show him kindness for the sake of another. Now look at the gracious acts of the king. Did David send a messenger to invite Mephibosheth to Jerusalem? Did he forward the cripple a pair of crutches and tell him to hobble to Jerusalem? No, indeed. II Samuel 9:5-7, *“Then king David sent, and fetched him out of the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, from Lodebar. Now when Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence. And David said, Mephibosheth, And he answered, Behold thy servant! And David said unto him, Fear not: for I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father’s sake; and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually.”*

All this foreshadows the efficacious work of the Holy Spirit in bringing sinners to Christ.



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