



“A Crippled Man at the King’s Table”

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He was a fugitive from justice for years. When he finally came face to face with the king, what happened is not what you would expect. Today, we’re going back to the Old Testament to discuss a story that you may not have heard much about. But it is a powerful story, not long in length, but what little it says draws a wonderful picture of one of the greatest themes in the Bible. This story happened about three thousand years ago. We’ll read one verse for our introduction.

II Samuel 4:4 “Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son who was lame 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 it happened, as she made haste to flee, that he fell and became lame. His name was Mephibosheth.”

Here is a young man who was entitled to all the riches, privilege, and power that would normally fall to the heir of a throne. But, of course, the demise of his father and his grandfather changed his fortunes. He would live many years of his life in exile, fearful and cowering of the day the new king would find him and take his life. That day finally came when he met the king. Let’s see what we can learn from this story and how it ought to inspire us all to seek the Lord.

A little over three thousand years ago, David as a young man began his political career in the courts of King Saul, the first king of Israel. It began with a good relationship; David was the armorbearer of the king, and even his son-in-law, having married his daughter. But the relationship quickly soured. You may recall that after the famous battle between David and the Philistine giant, Goliath, in which David slew the mighty giant, his fame spread abroad. All around, people were singing the song, *Saul has slain his thousands, but David his tens of thousands!* Well, that infuriated Saul, who was a proud and jealous man. He began to plot to kill David and David became a fugitive. He lived his life like a hunted animal. Despite Saul’s feelings for David, Saul’s son Jonathan felt differently about his friend David. They were wonderful friends. In fact, it’s a classic Bible story of what friendship is all about. They loved each other. So much so that the Bible says that Jonathan loved David very much, even as himself. One day, these

two friends made an agreement or covenant with each other that they would not only be friends with each other, but that they would show kindness to one another's families as well, their children and their descendants. That was a promise that both men took very seriously and solemnly, and they would never forget till the day they died, as we'll see today.

That day came all too soon for Jonathan. Saul and Jonathan were both killed in bloody hand-to-hand combat on the hills of Gilboa. That was a brutal time, and when a king was slain in battle, it was customary for the conquering king to descend upon the palace in the capitol, and execute every surviving member of the king's family in order to prevent a legitimate heir from rising up and trying to reclaim the throne later on. So, when news got back to the capitol that Saul and Jonathan had been killed, panic ensued. They assumed that the king was on his way and was going to descend upon the house and kill all the king's children and grandchildren. Thus, they began to flee.

Jonathan had a little boy who was only five years old at this time. The Bible tells us that when this news of Jonathan's death came, the nursemaid ran into the room and picked up the little boy and began to run for their lives. In the process, she somehow stumbled and dropped the child, badly injuring him. The Bible says that he was crippled or lame in both feet and would remain in that state for the rest of his life. That is recorded for us in one verse, our text. After we read that, we read nothing more of Mephibosheth for quite some time. (That name makes you thankful for a name like Bob, Bill, or Kevin, doesn't it?) I hope you'll never forget his name because though the Bible doesn't say much about him, what it does say is incredibly powerful. It's a tremendous analogy and picture of where WE stand in the eyes of the king yet today.

As I said, for a number of years, we hear nothing of Mephibosheth. Come to find out, he has been taken and exiled to a distant land called Lodebar-- a drear, desert, dismal place. He has grown up, doubtlessly living in fear. Assuming that one day, the king is going to find him. It wasn't a matter of IF, but WHEN. And when that happened, no doubt he'd be killed. You talk about a hopeless and dreary life. This young man who had been the rightful heir to all the power, fame, fortune, and privilege of the first king of Israel, King Saul, is now living in a little shack in a place called Lodebar, which literally means *place of barren pastures*. Growing up as a fugitive and just waiting to die.

The years pass. David has long since become king and you might think that Jonathan had just slipped away from David's memory, and certainly that his friend's children had been forgotten. But, you see, he had made that promise long before. A promise that others might forget, but not David. Suddenly, and seemingly very randomly, David asks a question that shatters all the years of silence in the palace hall. It must have stunned those present who remembered the relationship that David had had with Saul.

II Samuel 9:1 "Now David said, "Is there still anyone who is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?"

That had to be a shocking question to those who remembered how Saul had treated David. Notice two things about that question:

First, David says, *Is there anyone...* NOT *Is there someone...* There's a big difference between the two. There are a lot of people in religion today who are looking for *someone*; Jesus is looking for *anyone*. The Lord doesn't have a church made up of people who are only of a certain socio-economic background, race/ethnicity, or from a certain land/country. The church is not an American church, an African church or an Indian church. The Lord doesn't have a black church, a white church, a red church and a yellow

church; there is only the blood-bought church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus came into the world asking, *Is there anyone...?*

David isn't asking if there is *someone* who is qualified, good enough, smart enough or of use to him in his army. He asked if there was *anyone*. That's the question that the church needs to be asking today. It's the question that Jesus came into the world asking.

Revelation 22:17 "And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Luke 19:10 "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Jesus told His disciples, by way of parable:

Matthew 22:9 "Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage."

Second, David asks for any *of the house of Saul...Saul*, who hated him and tried to destroy him. Saul, who gathered all of his friends in the royal court and conspired against him. Who chased him across the hills of Israel like a wounded animal. *Is there any of HIS house to whom I may show kindness?* Friend, that is a picture of grace! David was a man after God's own heart. That is so vividly seen in how David is now seeking the descendants of Jonathan to honor the promise that he had made.

God made a promise a long, long time ago to faithful father Abraham. He chose Abraham and his posterity as the vehicle through which He would bless the Gentiles of the world. God made that promise to him saying, *"And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice"* (**Genesis 22:18**). Down through the ages, God had plenty of reason to have abandoned that promise; mankind certainly did not keep his end of the deal. The Bible concludes that ALL men—Jew and Gentile alike—are sinners in the sight of God.

Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;"

All are worthy of death because of our sin.

Romans 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death..."

But God keeps His promises. He kept His promise made to Abraham. He saved out a remnant down through the ages of time, and through them, He finally brought Jesus into the world, who gave His life for sinful man that we might be saved. Now, He didn't have to do that; God didn't have to send Him. God have every reason NOT to send Him, except that God in His love and mercy and according to His great plan, willed and desired that man be saved.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Ephesians 2:8-9 "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

That doesn't mean that obedience is unnecessary to salvation. Of course, obedience to the faith is essential to salvation; the Bible makes that plain.

Hebrews 5:9 “And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,”

Matthew 7:20-23” “Therefore by their fruits you will know them. Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”

Yes, obedience is necessary to salvation! That’s not the kind of works Paul is talking about in **Ephesians 2**. What he is saying is that salvation is not earned; it has not been merited. That man did nothing to deserve Jesus. Man did nothing to deserve God showing His grace in the person of Jesus Christ. It is by God’s grace that we can now come to Jesus Christ in obedient faith and claim the promises that God made a long time ago. That is grace.

Incidentally, if we understand grace, and how we are saved by grace and not of our own merit, how we are saved (undeserving though we may be), then that changes the way we look upon others. That changes the way we deal with other people. That gives us a great passion to take the gospel to all who are lost in sin. *Is there ANY of the house of Saul to whom I may show kindness?* When David asked that question, there was a paper-shuffling bureaucrat named Ziba who stepped out of the shadows, I imagine with a sneer in his voice, and replied.

II Samuel 9:3 “...And Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet.”

He didn’t just say, *Yes, Jonathan has a son. We know about him. We know where he is.* No, he said, *He has a son, but he’s crippled. He’s lame in both of his feet.* I think the implication is, *I’m not sure that’s who you’re looking for, David. He’s not exactly the right kind. He’s not going to fit in around here. I don’t think he’s exactly who you’re looking for.* David doesn’t say, *Well, how crippled is he? How bad off is he?* Instead, he says, *Where is he?* Ziba tells David that he is living in Lodebar. The king’s intelligence service had tracked this young man, and they knew where he was. David dispatches his men to go and get him. So, Mephibosheth, like I suppose every other day of his life, woke up living in fear that maybe this would be the day that the king would discover him and take him back to the capitol or kill him on the spot. Sure enough, this day, David’s royal entourage comes roaring up to this little shack where Mephibosheth has been hiding out in fear, living in exile. Without explanation, he is taken up into a chariot which goes racing back for the capitol city. As it pulls up before the palace, he is brought in before King David, assuming that at any moment some soldier is going to take a sword and cut off his head.

When he is brought in before King David, he falls down in absolute fear and humility. What else CAN he do? He couldn’t strut in before the king; he knew that the king held his life in his hand. What else can WE do when we understand God’s holiness and the fearfulness of God? When we understand that the Bible tells us not to fear those who can kill the body, but *“rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28)?*

Thanks be to God that when David looked down at Mephibosheth, he said two words that I doubt Mephibosheth expected to hear.

II Samuel 9:7 “And David said unto him, Fear not:”

You know, Jesus used those words throughout His ministry. There is plenty to fear when you think about what sin is and how God looks at sin. When you think about God's holiness and His justice. But there is also God's grace and mercy that says, *Fear not*. David told Mephibosheth that he would restore to him all that his family had lost in the fall; what his father and grandfather intended for him to have. Oh, what a great day this was in the life of Mephibosheth!

II Samuel 9:13 "So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem: for he did eat continually at the king's table; and was lame on both his feet."

That paints quite a picture in my mind. Can you picture what suppertime must have been like at the house of David? The king is ushered in and sits down at a long table of polished white marble, in an opulent room where the king's family would gather to eat. Perhaps his children gather that night to eat with their father. Maybe Joab, the courageous, muscular warrior at David's high command was there. All of the elite, beautiful people of Israel are assembled in this room. Down the hallway, you hear the shuffling and uneven footsteps of Mephibosheth. The crippled footsteps of this young man who was a fugitive from the king. He is brought into the room and he sits down beside the king and all of his beautiful family. Above the table, he is just like the rest of them; but beneath the table is the twisted story of his crippled past.

Friend, there is good news for you today because though you, through your sins, are a fugitive of heaven, the King of Glory is looking for you. Just like David was looking for Mephibosheth, the Lord is looking for you. It matters not the kind of life you've lived or what side of town you live on. It doesn't matter what kind of money you have or don't have. It doesn't matter how other people of the world look at you—whether they look up to you or down upon you. The Lord is interested in your soul. He wants to save your soul. He wants to shed His grace upon you. When you come and sit at His table, by His grace, you become just as whole and clean and pure as the blood of Jesus Christ can make you. Today can be a new day in your life. Maybe you're living in the land of Lodebar, with no hope, no peace and no joy. King Jesus is looking for you! I hope you'll obey His gospel today and find a new start in life, a cripple at the king's table.

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