

Mephibosheth and the King: A Story of Covenant Chesed II Samuel 9

From the ESV, with slight rephrasing from the Hebrew, **bolding** for emphasis and [comments in brackets]
By Bill Bjoraker, Ph.D.

We recall the covenant of friendship between David and Jonathan. At last Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, for we have sworn *chesed* (faithful loyalty and lovingkindness) to each other in the Yahweh's name. The Lord is the witness of a bond between us and our children forever" (I Sam. 20:42).

Mephibosheth was a son of Jonathan, who had been crippled as a boy of five years old, when his nurse dropped him in the flight after the defeat at the Battle of Gliboa (2 Samuel 4:4). Mephibosheth was by this time in his 20s (David had reigned in Hebron 7 years, and now Mephibosheth has a son, Micha). So at the time of this story, David was about in the middle of his 40-year reign.

We can see a contrast between the destinies of the House of Saul and the House of David—David came dancing and whirling into Jerusalem; the surviving member of the House of Saul comes limping into Jerusalem, crippled in both legs. The name "Mephibosheth" means "from the mouth of shame" (similar to his uncle's name, Saul's son, Ish-bosheth" means "man of shame"). A particularly poignant story, as the king demonstrates his *chesed* to one who feels so undeserving, and who indeed fears he may have been summoned to the king to face death, in that all the rest of the House of Saul had been eliminated... but where sin abounded, *chesed* did much more abound...



The King lifts Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan, in *chesed*.
... And a cripple in India today

1 One day David asked, *"Is anyone still left of the House of Saul— anyone to whom I can show **chesed** for Jonathan's sake?"* **2** He summoned a man named Ziba, who had been a servant of the House of Saul.

"Are you Ziba?" the king asked.

"At your service," Ziba replied.

3 The king then asked him, "Is anyone still alive from Saul's family? If so, I want to show **God's chesed** to them."

Ziba replied, *"Yes, one of Jonathan's sons is still alive. He is crippled in both feet."*

4 *"Where is he?"* the king asked.

"In Lo-debar," [means "nothing" or "no word"] Ziva told him, *"at the home of Machir son of Ammiel."*

5 So David sent for him and brought him from Machir's home.

6 His name was Mephibosheth; he was Jonathan's son and Saul's grandson. When he came to David, he bowed low to the ground in deep respect.

David said, *"Shalom, Mephibosheth."*

Mephibosheth replied, *"I am your servant."*

7 "Don't be afraid!" David said. *"I intend to show **chesed** to you because of my promise to your father, Jonathan. I will give you all the property that once belonged to your grandfather Saul, and **you will eat here with me at the king's table!**"*

8 Mephibosheth bowed respectfully and exclaimed, *"Who is your servant, that you should show such **chesed** to a dead dog like me?"*

9 Then the king summoned Saul's servant Ziba and said, *"I have given your master's grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family. **10** You and your sons and servants are to farm the land for him to produce food for your master's household. But Mephibosheth, your master's grandson, **will eat here at my table.**"* (Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.)

Ziba replied, **11** *"Yes, my lord the king; I am your servant, and I will do all that you have commanded."*

And from that time on, Mephibosheth **ate regularly at King David's table**, like one of the king's own sons.

12 Mephibosheth had a young son named Micha. From then on, all the members of Ziba's household were Mephibosheth's servants.

13 And Mephibosheth, who was crippled in both feet, lived in Jerusalem and **ate regularly at the king's table.**

Spiritual Observation Questions

1. What were David's choices in this matter?
2. Why does David say to Mephibosheth when they meet, "Don't be afraid." What might Mephibosheth have felt as he was escorted back to Jerusalem? Why might he have been afraid?
3. Did Mephibosheth have any bargaining power with the King? Can he offer anything?
4. At this time in Israel, dogs were not considered pets, or "man's best friend." They were wild, unclean, scavengers. In light of this, consider Mephibosheth's reply to King David, "A dead dog like me."
5. Imagine what Mephibosheth felt when he was invited to sit at the King's table one of the king's sons. Have you ever been in a situation like this?
6. What would have been the impact and ripple effects of David showing *chesed* to Mephibosheth? (Recall Mephibosheth had at least one son mentioned here- Micha).

Spiritual Application Questions

1. How important is it for God's people to keep their word, their covenants (promises)?
2. Picture King David here as his greater Son, the Messiah, the King of Kings. Picture your spiritual state before Him. How does Mephibosheth's condition speak of every fallen human? How might it describe you before you came to Him in faith?
3. How might we help people see their condition before God?... so they know their need of *chesed*?
4. When we were spiritually dead, Messiah Yeshua our King conferred his *chesed* on us and saved us. Paul tells us in Colossians 3 that though we continue to physically live on earth, our life is spiritually hidden in Messiah. Adopted into the royal family, we enjoy all the benefits as heirs of the King. What are some of those blessings? (See Ephesians 3:1-10).
5. How can we express the *chesed*, *agape* love of God to the (physically, emotionally, relationally, economically) crippled today?

Here is a fine application of the story's truths by Morgan Weistling:

ARE YOU REGULARLY AT THE TABLE OF THE LORD?

The story of David's kindness to Mephibosheth (Jonathan's last living son) in 2

Samuel 9 is a beautiful picture of the Gospel. Mephibosheth, lame in both feet and trembling in fear, prostrated himself before the king and asked, "What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?" (v. 8).

Under the monarch's rule in the ancient near east, a deposed ruler's children and descendants were generally annihilated by the reigning king in order to prevent a future insurrection. David, however, because of his covenant with Jonathan, (in 1 Samuel 20), sought to show "kindness" to remaining members of his immediate household. As the orphaned cripple trembled before him, uncertain of his fate, David had said, "Don't be afraid, 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."

This "kindness", alternately translated "loving-kindness", "mercy", and "love" is the Hebrew word "chesed", translated "agape" in Greek, and it carries the image of covenantal goodness and a commitment to give grace for another's sake. More than just sparing his life, King David had the orphan cripple seated at his own table for all of his meals henceforth. The king had him brought forth from Lo-Debar (lit. "wasteland"), where he was no doubt in hiding for his life. Mephibosheth lived out the rest of his life in the king's palace, enjoying a son's fellowship and access to him. What a privilege!

To sit at the king's table was no small thing. Even today, to be personally seated near a monarch or president speaks of honor, privilege and distinction. God Himself, Lord over all monarchs, repeatedly bids us to come to His table throughout Scripture. The table of the King represents:

1) Freedom (from brokenness). Like the lame exile of 2 Samuel, we cannot presume to hobble up to our Sovereign Ruler on our own strength. Judicially, we would have every reason to tremble in fear, but He has offered us relationship and intimacy even the angels cannot know. Why? Because He is gracious.

2) Family (becoming a child of the King). Because of Christ's work on our behalf, we are fully accepted in the beloved (Ephesians 1:6) and made co-heirs with Him (Romans 8:17). No longer an angry Judge (as He is to unbelievers), God is now our loving Father and we are encouraged to approach Him with

confidence (Hebrews 4:16). Our relationship to Him as sons and daughters is eternal and irrevocable.

3) Fellowship. We are not alone anymore! Part of the joy of the King's table, as at Thanksgiving or any other celebratory meal, is the presence of others and the joy that comes from relationship with them. When all is not joy and leisure, fellowship with other members of the Body of Christ means being held up at times. More than likely, Mephibosheth had to be carried to King David's table each day. In fact, he probably had to be carried into the king's presence when David first sent for him. It's okay if you need to be helped or even carried in to the King's table. The important thing is that you are there!

4) Food (being fed and satisfied). Scriptural mention of food speaks of abundance; a dearth of God's Word (as during the 400-year inter-Testamental period) is described as a "famine". God's food is His Word. He wants to satisfy us, regularly and completely, so that we will not hunger or thirst again (John 4:12-14). His Word truly is the bread of life, "so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:17).

So what are some reasons we are not there at the Lord's "table" regularly, if, in fact, we have been invited?

1) Are you crippled by who you are? Perhaps you don't think you are "good enough", and shrink away from the King's invitation. Oh, you may have trusted Him for salvation, but you shy away from the intimate, ongoing communion that is so necessary to a dynamic relationship with Christ. Well, the truth is – **YOU'RE NOT** "good enough" – but because He is, you are freely accepted and totally loved. Don't be "crippled" by some secret, shameful sin or what is in your past that makes you wonder "how could he love me?" The King doesn't see you as a "dead dog", but He delights in pouring out His grace and mercy on you for His own sake. It matters not who you are; but only **Whose** you are.

2) Maybe you're still in Lo-Debar. Are you still in the barren place, hiding from God? Or have you, like the Prodigal Son of Luke 15, heard His voice and even dwelt in His household, but have run off to the "wasteland" far from the King and His people? He calls you to Jerusalem – and His table.

3) “Well, Lord, I’ve been busy...” Like the ruler’s subjects of Luke 14, we have all sorts of excuses to keep us from fellowship with God. We don’t know what we’re missing! The blessing God wants to give you only comes if we’re there at His table – and there regularly. Often, we find we are not lingering at the King’s Table because we’re simply not feeling hungry. And why might that be?

Because we’re eating junk. If my kids fill up on Cheese Puffs and cookies an hour before dinner, I cannot expect them to have much of an appetite. The same thing applies spiritually – if we’re filled with something else – eating food that’s not the Word of God – we will be less likely to come eagerly to the table of the Lord when He calls. How much time do you spend watching TV that is not edifying? Facebook? Blogs (even Christian ones) that do not pass the Philippians 4:8* test? Do you go down rabbit trails in your spiritual road, engaging in debate simply for debate’s sake? All of these endeavors (some of which I have indulged at various times) are “spiritual junk food”.

4) Maybe, like Ziba, you’re just serving the wrong master. Have you been born again? Jesus bids all to come to Him, that they may have eternal life (John 5:40).

Like Mephibosheth, choose to eat at the table of the Lord regularly. It is the only way to cultivate intimacy with the Lord, learn what He requires and be changed by Him inwardly in order to obey, and to enjoy true fellowship with our spiritual siblings.

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