

# ***“A Place at the King’s Table”***

**2 SAMUEL 9**

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This morning I would invite you to look with me at a rather obscure character from the life of King David. Several months ago, I was talking with a friend of mine who preaches in another state, and he told me that the elders of his congregation had pulled him aside and had basically asked that he no longer preach any lessons from the Old Testament. He was asking my advice concerning what to do about that. I told him I would probably respond by preaching a 13-week series from the book of Leviticus! I was kidding, of course, but there is a tremendous value to studying the Old Testament. In fact, it is difficult to understand the New Testament without the Old Testament. I suppose that a person could be saved without ever having read the Old Testament, and yet that person would have a difficult time understanding so much of the New Testament. Over and over again, Jesus quoted from the Law of Moses, He quoted from the Psalms, He quoted from the prophets. It was Jesus who told His followers to ***“search the Scriptures”*** (John 5:39). He was referring to the Old Testament! It was Jesus who defended Himself against an attack by Satan by quoting three times from the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy (Matthew 4). It was Jesus who said that He had come to fulfill the Scriptures (Luke 24:27). Jesus, therefore, had an incredibly high view of the Old Testament. We could say the same thing about the apostles and the other New Testament writers. It was Paul who described the law as our ***“tutor”*** who led us to Christ (Galatians 3:24). It was Paul who said (in Romans 15:4) that, ***“...whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”*** This morning, then, we go back to the Old Testament for some instruction and encouragement from a rather obscure character in the life of King David.

And when I say “obscure,” I mean that he is pretty much unknown. He is only mentioned a few times. I know that I have never preached on this man before, and yet there are several details of his life that God thought were important enough to be recorded and preserved for us in the Bible. I am referring to a young man by the name of Mephibosheth, and the story of his life is found in 2 Samuel 9 (p. 505).

We remember that King David was chosen to be the next king as he was just a young man, as Saul was still king. Over the next several years, David would go on to kill Goliath. As David grew up, Saul got nervous and tried to kill David. David became close friends with Saul’s son, Jonathan. Eventually, Saul and Jonathan were basically killed in battle, and David was finally able to take the throne. During those early years, David’s kingdom grew very strong. The kingdom was expanding, and things were going very well. Sometimes we tend to focus on the negative in David’s life, but during those early years, things were going very well. In the middle of all of that success (maybe 15-20 years into it), we find that David has just a moment to slow down and

remember a promise that he had made many years ago. If you will, please look with me at all 13 verses in 2 Samuel 9,

*<sup>1</sup> Then David said, "Is there yet anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" <sup>2</sup> 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." <sup>3</sup> The king said, "Is there not yet anyone of the house of Saul to whom I may show the kindness of God?" And Ziba said to the king, "There is still a son of Jonathan who is crippled in both feet." <sup>4</sup> So the king said to him, "Where is he?" And Ziba said to the king, "Behold, he is in the house of Machir the son of Ammiel in Lo-debar." <sup>5</sup> Then King David sent and brought him from the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, from Lo-debar. <sup>6</sup> Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, came to David and fell on his face and prostrated himself. And David said, "Mephibosheth." And he said, "Here is your servant!" <sup>7</sup> David said to him, "Do not fear, for I will surely show kindness to you for the sake of your father Jonathan, and will restore to you all the land of your grandfather Saul; and you shall eat at my table regularly." <sup>8</sup> Again he prostrated himself and said, "What is your servant, that you should regard a dead dog like me?" <sup>9</sup> Then the king called Saul's servant Ziba and said to him, "All that belonged to Saul and to all his house I have given to your master's grandson. <sup>10</sup> "You and your sons and your servants shall cultivate the land for him, and you shall bring in the produce so that your master's grandson may have food; nevertheless Mephibosheth your master's grandson shall eat at my table regularly." Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. <sup>11</sup> Then Ziba said to the king, "According to all that my lord the king commands his servant so your servant will do." So Mephibosheth ate at David's table as one of the king's sons. <sup>12</sup> Mephibosheth had a young son whose name was Mica. And all who lived in the house of Ziba were servants to Mephibosheth. <sup>13</sup> So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, for he ate at the king's table regularly. Now he was lame in both feet.*

This morning, as we do with every passage of Scripture that we study in our Sunday lessons, I would like for us to go into this passage with the question: Why was this particular account preserved for us in the Bible? And as we study, I would like for us to consider David's original concern, I'd like for us to study a little background concerning this young man by the name of Mephibosheth, and then I'd like for us to look very carefully at the kindness extended by King David and the lessons that we can learn from it.

**I. But first of all, let us please look very carefully at DAVID'S CONCERN.**

Here is King David. He is in the middle of running the kingdom. He is out there winning wars. He is out there organizing programs, appointing leaders, making decisions, managing the nation, the kingdom is growing, financially the nation is running a huge surplus, those days of running from King Saul are long gone, and in the middle of all of this success, King David is suddenly overwhelmed with a memory of something that he had promised many, many years ago. His mind goes back to Jonathan, the son of King Saul. You might remember that Jonathan and David were close friends. In fact, very early on, Jonathan could see that God was with David and that God was no longer with his own father, and so Jonathan reached out to David started warning David concerning what Saul was trying to do. In the middle of it, back in 1 Samuel 20, Jonathan could see where things were going, and after warning David yet again, Jonathan said,

*And may the LORD be with you as He has been with my father. <sup>14</sup> "If I am still alive, will you not show me the lovingkindness of the LORD, that I may not die?" <sup>15</sup> "You shall not cut off your*

***lovingkindness from my house forever, not even when the LORD cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth."*** <sup>16</sup> ***So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the LORD require it at the hands of David's enemies."*** <sup>17</sup> ***Jonathan made David vow again because of his love for him, because he loved him as he loved his own life.*** (verses 13b-17)

So here we are maybe 15-20 years later. Saul is dead, Jonathan is dead, and David suddenly remembers that he needs to take care of some unfinished business. David remembers the covenant that he had made, and so the king asks a question in verse 1, ***"Is there yet anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?"*** Now let's remember the common practice of the day. It was common in those days for the new king to exterminate (to kill) all traces of the previous king's family. Most new kings tried to completely get rid of all possible challengers to the throne. When a new king took over, there were usually those who were loyal to the previous king, and so the new king would try to eliminate any possibility of going back and appointing a new king from the old bloodline. But we notice here that David remembered his oath and took steps to fulfill the covenant for the sake of his good friend Jonathan.

The move was voluntary. The move was an act of mercy. The move had nothing to do with Saul's descendants, but it had everything to do with David's love. It had everything to do with David's sense of mercy, with David's sense of concern. And right there, we start to see some very interesting parallels. Perhaps in at least some way, we start to see a picture of what the Lord has done for us. When it comes to our salvation, God moved first. God is the one who went looking for us.

I am reminded of a story from many years ago where an entire police force was mobilized to find a man who had stolen an old beat-up Volkswagen. They put word out over the radio, they did everything they could to find the man, because the owner of the car informed the authorities that there was a box of crackers on the front seat that he had laced with poison to kill some little critters at his house, but the car was stolen before he got home. The police, then, were desperately looking for the car, not primarily to put the man in jail, but to save his life! I certainly hope we can see some parallels there between what the cops were doing and what God is doing for us. As Jesus said in Luke 19:10, ***"...the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."*** God came looking for us! And in a similar way, David went looking for Saul's descendants—not to punish them, not to exterminate them, but so that he could show kindness to them. First of all, then, we learn something from King David's concern.

**II. As we look back at 2 Samuel 9, we can also learn something from MEPHIBOSHETH, the young man who was found.**

In verse 3, we discover that Mephibosheth is ***"crippled in both feet."*** What we do not learn in this passage is how he became crippled in both feet. If we turn back a few pages to 2 Samuel 1, we find that David hears of Saul's death. We then go through a time of war, a time of conflict between David's people and Saul's people. And as we come to 2 Samuel 4:4, we find a little note about Mephibosheth, ***"Now Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the report of Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel, and his nurse took him up and fled. And it happened that in her hurry to flee, he fell and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth."*** Very interesting! Here is Mephibosheth, only five years old. He is hanging out at home every day with his nanny. This woman is taking care of him as his father, Jonathan, is out there fighting all of these battles, as Jonathan is serving in Saul's kingdom. But then one day a messenger comes and says that Saul and Jonathan had been killed in battle. Well, let's think about that a little bit. Here you are as a nanny, responsible for the king's grandson, perhaps the heir to the throne, and then you hear that the king

and Jonathan have both been killed in battle. Well, the natural conclusion is to assume that somebody is coming for this kid! Again, in those days, it was common practice to wipe out the entire family of the king in order to avoid some kind of uprising in the future. So, the nanny grabs little Mephibosheth and starts running. But as she runs, the 5-year old boy falls and apparently breaks both of his feet (or maybe his ankles, or maybe his legs are crushed). She is obviously not in a position to take him to any kind of doctor, so she keeps running, and he ends up not being able to walk. And so we find that in a course of a day, Mephibosheth loses his dad and his grandfather and becomes handicapped for the rest of his life. The plans for his life have been shattered in an instant. The young man will never become king, he will never walk again, and chances are he will live the rest of his life on the run.

So here is this nanny and this 5-year old boy, they are basically homeless, and they eventually make their way to a place called Lo-debar. Literally translated, Lo-debar means “no pasture.” In other words, it was a wilderness area. There was nothing there—no grass to feed the animals, no real source of water, it was a barren wasteland. And yet that is where this nanny decided to go hide with this 5-year old boy with the broken legs. It was the only safe place to go. And for nearly 15 or 20 years, Mephibosheth lived in hiding in Lo-Debar—hiding, afraid, with no hope for the future, and apparently totally unaware of King David’s love.

As we think about this man’s life, we may start to see some parallels not only with our own lives but also with many people all around us—those who have lost a job with a lot of uncertainty in the future, those who are struggling with various physical challenges, those who have been abused by a parent, those who have been abandoned by a spouse, those who have listened so carefully as the doctor delivered bad news, those who have bounced a check for the mortgage and have no idea where the money for groceries will come from, those who are struggling with drug or alcohol addiction, those who are literally afraid of their own children when they go home at night, those who are far away from home for school or work and may be feeling cut off and separated from loved ones, those who have suffered the death of a close friend or relative, those who have struggled spiritually and have lost all sense of spiritual direction in this life. We may not know exactly what Mephibosheth was going through in Lo-Debar, but then again, maybe we have more in common with Mephibosheth than we may think. There are times when circumstances can just suck the joy right out of this life. Mephibosheth understood exactly what that was like.

### III. **Now that we have put ourselves back in his position, I’d like for us to close by looking at THE KINDNESS THAT KING DAVID EXTENDED.**

In verse 5, King David sent a messenger and brought Mephibosheth back from Lo-Debar. I don’t know if we can really appreciate the terror that must have come over this man as he is summoned by the king, a king that he most likely assumed was hostile to his family. And so in verse 6, we find that Mephibosheth **“came to David and fell on his face and paid homage.”** Here is this man who cannot walk, and he lays down on his face at the feet of King David, and David says, **“Mephibosheth!” “Behold, I am your servant.”** And David said to him, **“Do not fear, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan.”** The word **“kindness”** is sometimes translated as **“lovingkindness,”** it is a word that is often used to refer to the loyal and steadfast love of God for His people. It is the word that David used in Psalm 23:6 when he said, **“Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life.”** He was referring to the love, to the kindness of God. It is the word translated **“loyalty”** in Hosea 6:6, where God said, **“For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice....”** King David, therefore, said that he would show that kind of love to Mephibosheth. In fact, he would bring him into his own home. Now certainly David could have just provided Mephibosheth a nice pension. David could have sent servants to Lo-Debar. David could have just issued some kind of decree honoring that family. But instead, King David gave Mephibosheth a place at the table.

At this point, Mephibosheth didn't know what to think, and so he said (in verse 8), ***“What is your servant, that you should show regard for a dead dog such as I?”*** Did you notice that David never answered that question? After verse 8, the king is silent. In my mind, I picture King David being overcome with emotion. Perhaps David remembered his own words maybe 20 years earlier when he cut off a piece of Saul's robe and tried to reason with King Saul. You might remember what David said to Saul in 1 Samuel 24:14, ***“After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog, a single flea?”*** You see, King David had been in that position. King David had been the dead dog! King David had been lifted by God to the king's table. And now Mephibosheth, the young man who might have been king, is invited to sit down for dinner with David, elevated to the position of family. Whatever David ate, he ate. In fact, three times in this short chapter, Mephibosheth is described as eating at the king's table ***“continually.”*** In other words, this was not a temporary act to give David a little bit of good PR, but this was David's way of permanently accepting Mephibosheth as a part of the royal family, not as a slave, not as a servant, but as a son. And now he is able to eat right along with men like Amnon, Absalom, and later Solomon, and the other possible heirs to the throne.

This morning I hope we can see that we are in a similar situation spiritually as Mephibosheth was in physically, and I hope we can see that the grace of God goes looking for us. As we noted earlier in this lesson: God moved first. As the Bible says in Titus 2:11, ***“...the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men.”*** If we have any doubts about that, we could ask Joseph. The grace of God found Joseph in a pit and raised him up the position of second in command to Pharaoh, king of Egypt. We could ask the prodigal son. The grace of God found him in a pigpen in a far off land and brought him to his senses. We could ask the woman at the well. The grace of God found her at a well in the middle of nowhere. The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men.

This morning, then, as we look at Mephibosheth, let us be thankful for our own salvation. And as we get ready to close our thoughts on this passage, I'd like to ask a question: When Mephibosheth sat down at the king's table, do you think he ever complained about the food that was served? Do you think he ever forgot how he got there? Do you think he ever lost that sense of awe? Do you think he ever told other people how good David had been to him? Again, I hope we can see ourselves in this young man, and I certainly hope that we will also be thankful for what the Lord has done for us.

### **Conclusion:**

As we close, I would like for us to imagine that whenever King David ate a meal, he would look across the table, and he would see his good friend Jonathan whenever he looked at Mephibosheth. He would see the family resemblance, and he would remember at least a little bit of Jonathan's kindness. But even more than that, David would think about the kindness of God, and David would remember that he was once considered a dead dog just as Mephibosheth was.

And then on the other hand, whenever Mephibosheth sat down, he would see King David, a king who chased him down and brought him from Lo-Debar all the way back to Jerusalem, a great king who demonstrated kindness as no one else had ever done. But even more than that, Mephibosheth would see the kindness of King David's God, a God who invites all people to the table, even the weak and the lame, a God who longs for all people to be a part of the family.

In just a moment as we symbolically gather around the Lord's Table, I hope we will remember Mephibosheth. Let's remember where we came from, and let's remember what a blessing it is to be invited to eat at the King's Table. For those of you who have not yet obeyed the gospel, we want you to know that the King has

given an invitation. And no matter where we've been or what we've done, the invitation is still out there. We accept the invitation by believing in Jesus as the Son of God, by repenting of our sins, and by allowing ourselves to be briefly dipped in water (obeying the Lord's command) for the forgiveness of our sins. As Christians, it is our great privilege to invite others to join us at the table. If you have any questions, please let us know, but if you are ready to accept the Lord's invitation right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

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