

Catalog No. 5260
2 Samuel 9
6th Message
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June 29th, 2008

LIVING LOVE

SERIES: "DAVID, A MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART"

Last Sunday night, my family was watching the TV show "Extreme Home Makeover." I didn't see the whole show but came in just as a twelve-year-old girl named Taylor was sharing that she had been home years ago when her mother had answered the door and been shot to death by her estranged ex-boyfriend. If that weren't traumatic enough, her father had died in a car accident in 2001. Taylor talked about how terrified she was the day he died, wondering who would take care of her and her siblings. Fortunately, her mother's sister and husband took them in. But being school teachers with three of their own small children, they were pretty crowded in their home. "Extreme Home Makeover" stepped in to build them a house that would fit all of them, including a new baby on the way. As always happens on the show, the family was sent away for a week, and when they returned, their new home was unveiled to them. It was fun to watch their excitement, tears, and joy as they saw their new home. Taylor was most touched by the dining room. She stood by the mahogany dining table that was set with ten chairs and set with ten place settings, and she had tears in her eyes. When she was asked why the table was making her cry, she said, "My aunt and uncle have always loved us and treated us like their own, but now I have a place at the family table. Our other table was too small for us all to sit together. Now our whole family can eat every night together. I feel like I belong. I have my own place at the table."

Being loved and belonging are the desires of every human heart. God made us with these desires. East of Eden, many people have lost the sense of being loved and belonging. Our story for this morning is about one such man, Mephibosheth. He didn't know he was loved or belonged anywhere, but love reached out to him and brought him into a King's palace and into a belonging he had never dreamed would be his.

This morning our passage is 2 Samuel 9. By this time in David's story, he is well established as king of Israel. Saul's house no longer opposes him, and neither do the Philistines. David is at peace. 2 Samuel 8:15 summarizes this time in his reign with, "David reigned over all Israel; and David administered justice and righteousness for all his people." This is the ruler that God had intended Israel to have: a king who would follow God and rule the people of God with justice and righteousness. David is the man after God's own heart who foreshadows the future King of Israel, Jesus, who would reign with justice and righteousness over all the earth forever and ever (2 Samuel 7).

Now, at this time, David remembers his promise to his best friend Jonathan. Jonathan knew this day would come in David's life. He knew David would be king because he discerned God's will in the death of his father and anointing of David. Foreseeing this day, Jonathan made this request, "If I am still alive, will you not show me the lovingkindness of the Lord, that I may not die? And 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" (1 Samuel 20:14 NASB). David promised he would do just what Jonathan asked.

In those days, when one king took over from another, the new king would usually kill everyone of the opposing royal family to secure peace, thus leaving no rebels still alive.¹ But the covenant between Jonathan and David assured that this would not happen. In the first week of this series, we heard the story of David lamenting the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, so we know that Jonathan did not live to see David become king or to see this covenant fulfilled. But David is a king who keeps his promises. Our passage for this morning begins with a question posed by David:

David asked, “Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?” (2 Samuel 9:1)

At the height of David's glory and fame as king of Israel, he could have begun to rule in many ways. He chooses to begin by extending love.² David's promise to Jonathan prevails over the hate Saul's house has shown David. David's lovingkindness here blesses without expecting anything in return. To love like this is dangerous, for Jonathan's heir could rise up against David at some point and claim his rightful place as king, but this is a chance that David's love is willing to take.

The past few weeks, we have studied David connecting with God through all his sorrows and joys. I have characterized him as holding nothing back from God (2 Samuel 1 and 2 Samuel 6). Now, in our passage for this morning, he is living out his connection to God. We are seeing the fruits of a life lived in love with God. Love seeks to bless others.

Lovingkindness from God

David says he wants to show “kindness” in verse 1 (in the NIV) to Jonathan's heir, and the writer clarifies in verse 3 that it is God's kindness that David wants to show. Regular human kindness and God's kindness are not the same thing.

When I think of the word “kindness,” I often think of a particular behavior, like bringing soup to a sick neighbor. This is good and it is kind, but it is not God's kindness. It is not enough. God's kindness is more.

Kindness in this passage is translating the Hebrew word *chesed*. *Chesed* is God's love. It takes many words to describe how God loves, but here are some of the concepts rapped up in *chesed*, or what is called God's kindness, in this passage. Mercy is in God's kindness. Mercy is something that one in a high position can give one in a lowly position who needs help. Here David the king can give help or mercy to one in a lowly position. *Chesed* is a relational word, not an impersonal force. God's kindness is faithful, keeps all its promises, and freely offers rescue. God acts to save because that is how he is; it is who he is. In our passage for this morning, I am going to use the archaic word lovingkindness throughout in place of the word kindness. I believe this is a better word to use because it is the closest thing to the Hebrew word *chesed*.³

All that being said, David is going to extend the love he has received from God to Jonathan's heir. He can give it because he knows it, and he has it within him to give because David listens to the Spirit of God within him.

David finds the crippled heir

Now there was a servant of Saul's household named Ziba. They called him to appear before David, and the king said to him, “Are you Ziba?”

“Your servant,” he replied.

The king asked, “Is there no one still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show God's kindness?”

Ziba answered the king, “There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in both feet.”

“Where is he?” the king asked.

Ziba answered, “He is at the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar.”

So King David had him brought from Lo Debar, from the house of Makir son of Ammiel. (2 Samuel 9:2-5)

Just as God's love reaches out to those who are still caught in sin and who are unworthy, so David's lovingkindness reaches out to Jonathan's son who is “crippled in both feet.” The only thing that Saul's servant Ziba thinks to say about Jonathan's son is that he is crippled and in both feet. Mephibosheth probably cannot walk, or if he does, it is probably with very great difficulty. In the ancient near eastern culture, being crippled or having an infirmity was to be considered useless, and unworthy.⁴ The cultural assumption was that the sufferer somehow caused his lameness by somehow displeasing God.

This is often a question we will ask in our suffering: “Did I bring this on myself? Did something my parent did cause me to have this affliction? Is God punishing me?”

One thousand years after this story, one of Jesus' disciples asked Jesus as they passed by a man blind from birth, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?” And Jesus answered, “It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was in order that the word of God might be displayed in him” (John 9:2-3, NASB). Have you considered that the very thing that causes you the most distress and pain might be the very thing that God uses most powerfully to demonstrate his love and presence?

How then, did Jonathan's son become crippled? His story is told in 2 Samuel 4:4. Saul's house was notified that Saul and Jonathan had perished in the battle against the Philistines at Jezreel, and the news threw Saul's house into a frenzy of activity in trying to flee before Saul's enemies could attack and kill them all. The Philistines were notoriously vicious and surely would have killed all of Saul's house, so they had to run for their lives. Saul's house may also have feared David and his men since Saul had been warring with David, as well. Sadly for Mephibosheth, in the rush and panic to get out fast, his nurse dropped him. He was five years old at the time. His feet were broken in the fall and apparently did not mend straight, so he became crippled. His nurse probably took him to the home in Lo-Debar where David found him (maybe she was from that area), which is located east of the Jordan River in desert country.⁵ The people who took him in were not wealthy, but the place was a good hideout though for a fearful young prince. No one knew of the covenant made between Jonathan and David, so Mephibosheth was essentially hiding from love and didn't know it.

Let's look at verses 6-8.

When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor.

David said, “Mephibosheth!”

“Your servant,” he replied.

“Don't be afraid,” David said to him, “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.”

Mephibosheth bowed down and said, “What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?”

What a scene! Mephibosheth is now a grown man. He has a five-year-old son named Micah, we learn a little later. He probably thought that the king finally discovered his hiding place after all his years in hiding. He must have thought he was going to die.

It says in verse 6 that Mephibosheth “bowed down to pay him honor” in the NIV. Bowing for us might mean bowing at the waist, nodding our heads in a gesture of ascent, or putting our hands together and bowing as they do in some Eastern cultures. But what really happened was that Mephibosheth came into the king's presence and “fell on his face and prostrated himself” (as it says in the NASB). That is much more dramatic than our simple word “bowing.” “Prostrated” means “to put or throw flat with the face down, as in submission or adoration.”⁶ Just imagine now how hard it would have been for a crippled man to do this physically, and how pathetic he must have looked. He most likely was so filled with fear that he did not even look up at David. And as I pictured this from Mephibosheth's position, I also wondered how it must have looked to David. Here was the son of David's closest friend, Jonathan. I wondered if Mephibosheth looked like Jonathan? Jonathan was beautiful – was Mephibosheth equally attractive? I wondered if David thought about Jonathan in all his strength and glory as a warrior and then looked down at this crippled, sad fellow in front of him and was thus overcome with compassion and love. I can hear David's heart breaking, “Oh, Jonathan, look at your only son – so sad and alone and broken, may I be able to help him as you helped me once.” Well, this is how I imagine David might be feeling. David quickly reassures Mephibosheth that it is going to be alright. David says, “Mephibosheth! Do not be afraid!”

This is the first time anyone has spoken Mephibosheth's name in the text. David knows Mephibosheth's name. Before this, he is only identified by Ziba as the “crippled-in-both-feet” son of Jonathan. As far as Ziba was concerned, he was a no-name worthless fellow – perhaps except for the fact that he was related to Jonathan.

What's in a name? What is it like to only be known as “the crippled man” all your life? I bet people around him felt sorry for him. They might have said something like, “Look at poor Mephibosheth. He was a prince once, but now look at him.” I bet he knew derision, scorn, hurt, helplessness, and fear all his life. He refers to himself later in our text as a dead dog. For a Hebrew, this is an expression for the lowliest thing on earth.

What does the name Mephibosheth tell us? Names in scripture are often important, as they tell us the character or some attribute of the person. Mephibosheth's name includes the idea of shame. Some think his name means “big shame,” some think “dispeller of shame,” and others think his name means simply “the shame.” Whatever the specific meaning, his identity has been eaten up with shame. Mephibosheth, crippled in both feet, is about to be given a new start on life.

In verse 7, David says, “Do not be afraid.” Where else have you heard someone in scripture say, “Do not be afraid” when about to announce good news? We can recall Gabriel, when he came to Mary and said, “Don't be afraid, I come with tidings of good news.” Whenever angels appear with announcements of glad tidings, the humans are told to “fear not” as God is about to bless them. We can observe the same formula here. David is about to bless the socks off Mephibosheth, the man of shame!

David shows lovingkindness to Mephibosheth

David does three things to show his lovingkindness to Mephibosheth, and these three things are what God does for us.

1. *King David seeks Mephibosheth out.* Mephibosheth did not seek David. God's lovingkindness seeks out someone to bless.

2. *King David restores Saul's land to Mephibosheth and makes him a man of wealth.* He gives him a way to always provide for his family and thereby gives him his dignity. Mephibosheth no longer has to live dependent on others. David provides Ziba to manage the lands, as Mephibosheth could not do this for himself. God's lovingkindness restores what is lost. What is most lost here is Mephibosheth's dignity. He is full of shame. A psalm of David, Psalm 23, aptly describes God's restoration when it says, "He restores my soul" (v. 3).

3. *King David gives Mephibosheth a place at his table.* Belonging to the King's house – what a restoration for a displaced prince. Mephibosheth is given a new identity as son of the king. Being made worthy to sit at the king's table and be part of his family must have been amazing to Mephibosheth. Here he was, a dead dog, crippled and living on the kindness of others, and now he is lifted up to a place in David's kingdom. He is not a slave but a son. He has been living as a pauper and now will live like a prince. Sounds like the theme of many books and fairy tales, doesn't it?

It is impossible for me to hear this story and not think of Jesus' ministry on earth. In the gospel of Luke, we hear that Jesus, "Came to seek and save that which was lost." God's lovingkindness seeks us out through his son Jesus.

Responding in gratitude and humility

Then the king summoned Ziba, Saul's servant, and said to him, "I have given your master's grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family. You and your sons and your servants are to farm the land for him and bring in the crops, so that your master's grandson may be provided for. And Mephibosheth, grandson of your master, will always eat at my table." (Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.)

Then Ziba said to the king, "Your servant will do whatever my lord the king commands his servant to do." (2 Samuel 9:9-11)

David's kingship has already been summarized in chapter 8 as just and righteous, and here he demonstrates how true that summary is. David is truly a king after God's own heart. His lovingkindness to Mephibosheth provides for him holistically. When David acknowledges Mephibosheth before Ziba as one who is like a son to him (always eating at his table), he has given Mephibosheth a new place of respect in the community. He has lifted him from a place of shame to an identity as a royal son. He has physically provided for him as well. What mercy and what a welcome.

How will Mephibosheth receive David's invitation to dinner? We have seen how thoroughly David loved Mephibosheth and how David's lovingkindness is a picture of how God loves us. Think about how Mephibosheth received all of this. It says he prostrated himself before David at the beginning and ending of this meeting. Perhaps in the beginning, he threw himself down before David in abject fear, but at the end of the meeting, with all of David's blessings, he throws himself down again and prostrates himself before David. What does this mean?

I imagine that he is overwhelmed with *gratitude*. How could he have ever imagined that his meeting with David could end like this? His *humility* is real when he says, "What is your servant that

you should regard a dead dog like me?” Indeed, what is any man that God should take notice of him, yet God does. It is the greatness of God and the greatness of our need that causes him to reach down and rescue us out of this mess we Mephibosheths are in. May our response to God’s grace in our lives be as full of humility as Mephibosheth’s response to David.

I have noticed that it is often the hardships in our lives that humble us and open us to God. Mephibosheth’s broken feet may have been his bridge to the throne of grace, where God could be found.

We don’t often think of Ray Stedman, our pastor for over forty years in this church, as having a Mephibosheth kind of story. However, I am convinced all of us have such a story in one way or another, and I thought it would be good to hear about Ray’s. I read his biography a few years ago – and if any of you is curious about our PBC roots, it would be a good read for you, as well. It is called *Portrait of Integrity*.

Ray’s growing up time with his parents was very hard. His father was a distant and detached father until he finally abandoned the family altogether when Ray was ten years old. His mother, who is characterized in the book as an asthma sufferer and perhaps a hypochondriac, put Ray and his brother Alan in an orphanage shortly after her husband’s abandonment. Ray’s aunt and uncle came to get him (he was apparently a handful), and his younger brother Alan went to be with his mother eventually. Ray lived with his Methodist aunt and uncle for the rest of his growing up years. Mark Mitchell, one of Ray’s disciples, wrote Ray’s biography. In it, he says, “His father’s desertion and disappearance, and his mother’s placing him in an orphanage – these events left indelible marks on Ray Stedman. He never forgot how it felt to be abandoned, and he knew the relief of being cared for in times of need. Being abandoned by his father also prepared Ray for a relationship with his Heavenly Father. He received Christ at a tent revival meeting when he was ten. “This is the way I came to Christ,” Ray said when telling of his conversion. “I read the Bible and heard quoted from the Bible some wonderful promises....As I heard these, hope flamed in my heart because this is what I longed to find...rest, fulfillment, supply, companionship, blessing, light in place of darkness....And then I heard the story of...the cross in all its wonder and mystery...I couldn’t understand it fully-I was only a boy about ten years of age when I heard this story and believed it. But I realized that here was a God who could do something about my problem, and I believed His Word.... When I did so, the course of my life altered – the direction of my life changed....I found a new capacity to love.”⁷

The indelible marks of abandonment remained with Ray Stedman all his life, but we know God turned those wounds into a powerful ministry of God’s Word in the world. He consistently poured his life into young lives, acting as a spiritual father to many. He was giving what he didn’t receive on earth but what he received from God’s lovingkindness to him.

Another great Bible teacher, Beth Moore, writes, “I would never have learned to walk with God on healthy feet had I never experienced sitting at His table as a cripple. My emotional and spiritual healing has come from approaching God in my handicapped state and believing I was His child worthy of His love.”⁸

Now Beth, once abused and harmed by men, has a healing ministry of God’s word to others worldwide.

And David, once invited to eat at King Saul’s table, suffered rejection, death threats, and a final exile at Saul’s hands. How painful that was. But God’s lovingkindness to David proved sufficient during those hard times – so much so that David learned to love unselfishly. And David knew exactly how to love Mephibosheth because he knew what it was to be cast off from a king’s table. He would never do that to Mephibosheth.

I know few people mightily used by God who do not come through the crucible of something equivalent to a “crippling in both feet” and find the love of God there, in their darkest place.

Can we imagine ourselves prostrate before the Lord, as Mephibosheth was prostrate before David? What desertion, physical impairment, family history, causes you to recognize your need and bend your knee to the King who can help? This is what he will do for you: “And great multitudes came to Him (Jesus), bringing with them those who were lame, crippled, blind, dumb, and many others, and they laid them down at His feet; and He healed them, so that the multitude marveled as they saw the dumb speaking, the crippled restored, and the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel” (Matthew 15:30-31).

Someday, in God’s future kingdom, we will all be restored what we lost here on this sad little planet, but for now, we wait in hopeful expectation of that day and experience in part what will then be fully realized. (I Corinthians 13:12, NASB). James 4:4 says, “Humble yourself in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.”

Our final scene in verses 11b-13 finds Mephibosheth eating at the king’s table regularly:

And Mephibosheth ate at David's table like one of the king's sons.

Mephibosheth had a young son named Mica, and all the members of Ziba's household were servants of Mephibosheth. And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king's table, and he was crippled in both feet.

Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem and always ate at David’s table. He accepted the lovingkindness of David. The narrator of 2 Samuel ends this passage the way he began, saying, “Mephibosheth was crippled in both feet,” indicating that Mephibosheth brought nothing to the king’s table but his great need. That we find Mephibosheth eating with the king is an act of pure grace.

Our time together began with the story of Taylor’s tears of joy as she found a place at the family table for her and knew she finally belonged. Love and belonging are written on the hearts of men and women because God put those desires there. We look forward to someday eating together as God’s family at one large table. King Jesus has set a place at the table for each one of us. The apostle John was given a glimpse of this heavenly reality. Picture yourself there.

And from the throne came a voice that said, “Praise our God, all his servants, from the least to the greatest, all who fear him.”

Then I heard again what sounded like the shout of a huge crowd, or the roar of mighty ocean waves, or the crash of loud thunder: “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Let us be glad and rejoice and honor him. For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb, and his bride has prepared herself... And the angel said, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb.” And he added, “These are true words that come from God.” (Revelation 19:5-9, NASB)

Jesus says, “Come to me all of you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:28, NASB). You are invited – will you come?

¹ Bruggemann, Walter. *1 & 2 Samuel*. John Knox Press. pg. 268.

² Petersen, Eugene. *Leap Over a Wall*. Harper Collins. pg. 172

³ Kindness in this text is a translation of the Hebrew word *chesed*. KJV translates it as “lovingkindness,” a word that is arcane and which the NIV has made “kindness.” It communicates that one is in need and another is equipped to give help. Mercy is encompassed in the word, as well as faithfulness, keeping promises, acts of love, and attributes of character. This is a special kind of love. God’s love is *chesed* in the OT. And so, although “lovingkindness” is arcane, it is closer to the meaning of this word (*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testaments*. Moody Press. pg. 307).

⁴ Gaebelien, Frank. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*. Zondervan. pg. 917.

⁵ *Ibid*.

⁶ <http://www.bartleby.com/61/5/P0610500.html>

⁷ Mitchell, Mark. *Portrait of Integrity*. Discovery House Publishing. pg. 22-23.

⁸ Moore, Beth. *A Man After God’s Heart*. pg. 162