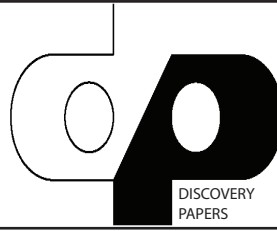


A SEAT AT THE TABLE

**SERIES: A LIFE OF PASSION:
THE STORY OF DAVID.**



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2 Samuel 9:1–10:19
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2 Samuel 9:1-10:19

C.S. Lewis tells of a time when his wife Joy felt the approach of God: “[She] was haunted all one morning as she went about her work with the obscure sense of God (so to speak) ‘at her elbow,’ demanding her attention,” which raised her concern. She put up her guard, wondering whether God was concerned about some sin in her life or had some difficult task for her.¹[C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), 55.]

Have you ever had the sense that God was at your elbow? How do you respond to the approach of God? God, of course, has approached us—and continues to approach us—in Jesus Christ, the Messianic King.

In 2 Samuel 9-10, the King’s forerunner, David, approaches two individuals with identical overtures. The individuals have markedly different responses. In these two chapters, we sense the approach of Jesus. What does he have to do with us? How will we respond?

No-name from No-word

2 Samuel 9:1-13:

And David said, “Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” 2 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.” 3 And the king said, “Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God to him?” Ziba said to the king, “There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in his feet.” 4 The king said to him, “Where is he?” And Ziba said to the king, “He is in the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar.” 5 Then King David sent and brought him from the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar. 6 And Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, son of Saul, came to David and fell on his face and paid homage. And David said, “Mephibosheth!”

And he answered, “Behold, I am your servant.” 7 And David said to him, “Do not fear, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan, and I will restore to you all the land of Saul your father, and you shall eat at my table always.” 8 And he paid homage and said, “What is your servant, that you should show regard for a dead dog such as I?”

9 Then the king called Ziba, Saul’s servant, and said to him, “All that belonged to Saul and to all his house I have given to your master’s grandson. 10 And you and your sons and your servants shall till the land for him and shall bring in the produce, that your master’s grandson may have bread to eat. But Mephibosheth your master’s grandson shall always eat at my table.” Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. 11 Then Ziba said to the king, “According to all that my lord the king commands his servant, so will your servant do.” So Mephibosheth ate at David’s[a] table, like one of the king’s sons. 12 And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Mica. And all who lived in Ziba’s house became Mephibosheth’s servants. 13 So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, for he ate always at the king’s table. Now he was lame in both his feet.

The noun translated “kindness” in verse 1 (*hesed*) can either convey an attitude, a commitment, or both. The LORD, motivated by an attitude of *hesed*, or love, pledges his commitment of *hesed*, or loyalty, when he makes covenants with his people. When Saul, the former king, was alive, he tried to kill David because he perceived David to be a threat to his reign. However, Jonathan, Saul’s son, loved David and risked his life for him. Jonathan and David entered into a covenant relationship that involved both love and loyalty (1 Samuel 18:3; 20:8, 12-17, 42; 23:18). David even promised both Jonathan and Saul that he would not cut off their offspring (1 Samuel 24:20-22).

David doesn't know if there's anyone left in Saul's family. Normally, if a king were to inquire in such a way about the previous dynasty, he would do so in the interest of eliminating any threats to his reign. David, though, is interested in blessing Saul's house because of his covenant with Jonathan. This is *hesed*, and it even goes beyond anything that David has promised. He promised not to kill; he did not promise to bless. He seeks to bless the old dynasty!

Ziba, a servant in the family of Saul, tells David that a son of Jonathan is still alive and adds that he is crippled in both feet, probably to assure the king that he poses no threat. He lives in Lo-debar, which means "No-word." Note also that Ziba doesn't divulge the man's name. He's a no-name from No-word—a city of silence, perhaps? On the one hand, Jonathan's son probably likes it that way, for if the king found out about him, his life might be in danger. On the other hand, what's it like to be unknown—or to be known only by your disability? "Oh, you mean that crippled kid? What's his name again? Wasn't he heir to the throne at one time?"

Mephibosheth receives David

Finally, the narrator identifies Jonathan's son. Actually, if we've read 2 Samuel 4, we already know his name. He's Mephibosheth. When he was five years old, Saul and Jonathan, his grandfather and father, respectively, were killed in battle. When Mephibosheth's nurse heard the news, she picked him up to flee, but he fell and became lame (2 Samuel 4:4). In one day, the boy lost his grandfather, he lost his father, he lost the throne, and he lost his legs. Talk about childhood trauma! Years later, the new king finds him, and Mephibosheth must be thinking he's about to lose his life.

When Mephibosheth was a child, he fell because a nurse dropped him. Now he falls of his own accord: he falls before the king. It must be noted that Mephibosheth has little choice in the matter. He's crippled, and the king orders him to come. What's he going to do, fight back? In his weakness, he falls before the king. What does the king do? He says his name. David knows his name and speaks it. For what purpose?

"Do not fear," David says. A grandson of the old king who is brought to the new king would normally have much to fear. David not only spares Mephibosheth, he also blesses him. David not only blesses Mephibosheth, he also blesses him lavishly, giving him all the land that had belonged to Saul, giving him a perpetual seat at the

king's table, and charging Ziba and his house, which includes fifteen sons and twenty servants, with caring for the estate. That's thirty-five people to care for the no-name cripple from No-word! With the produce from the land, Mephibosheth will always have bread to eat. But why does he need it? He'll be eating at the king's table.

Mephibosheth, who lost his father, the presumptive heir to the throne, now has a new father, for David treats Jonathan's son like is own son. Now we also learn that Mephibosheth has a son, Mica, so Saul's line, though Jonathan and Mephibosheth, continues. David moves Mephibosheth from Lo-debar to Jerusalem, from No-word to the city with a name that will reverberate through the ages.

Mephibosheth's cup runneth over.

Mephibosheth is blown away: "What is your servant, that you should show regard for a dead dog such as I?" Ah, who else has identified himself as a dead dog? David has! David, when he was hiding from Saul, called himself "dead dog" (1 Samuel 24:14). But the LORD rescued him raised him up to the throne. When David looks at Mephibosheth, who has been hiding from him, he sees himself. What is Mephibosheth, David's servant? He is what David used to be, a dead dog. Now that he's king, David rescues the dead dog and gives him a seat at the royal table.

Who are we?

Maybe we're Mephibosheth. Even if we're not crippled physically, we're crippled emotionally.

Most of us have suffered loss of one sort or another, in many cases beginning in childhood. Our family failed us or dropped out of the picture in some way. A nurse probably didn't drop us, but someone who should have carried us in some way dropped us, so to speak. We began to view ourselves and the world in a certain way. We conceived of ourselves as the victims of someone or something. Our destiny took a wrong turn somewhere.

Some of us feel as if we're a no-name. We feel as if we're identified by, and held back by, our limitations. We suffer in silence. We feel unknown. Maybe we don't want to be known. Maybe we're happy to come on Sunday and leave as soon as the service is over, not to be seen again until the next Sunday we work ourselves up to doing the same thing. Or maybe we're happy to be with people and put up a happy front so that no one knows

us too well. In one way or another, like Mephibosheth, we're hiding—both from people and from God. We're afraid of being found out.

Maybe, like Mephibosheth, we feel like a dead dog, or like the veteran in Bruce Springsteen's song who was "Born in the USA": "Born down in a dead man's town / The first kick I took was when I hit the ground / You end up like a dog that's been beat too much / Till you spend half your life just covering up."²

Who is Jesus?

Who are we? Maybe we're Mephibosheth? Who is Jesus? He's the Son of David, the Messianic King.

What does the King do? Like his predecessor, he scours the kingdom in search of . . . you. "Where is she?" he asks. "Where is he?" he asks. He finds out and sends for you. You come into his presence. What choice do you have? He's the King. You're suspicious. Maybe you're often suspicious when someone wants to speak with you. What does he want?

The King speaks. What does he say? He speaks your name. He knows your name! "Do not fear," he says. If your story is anything like Mephibosheth's, you have much to fear, and the fear isn't going away with a single command. Some people say you have nothing to fear just before they abuse you. Does the king abuse you?

No, he blesses you, and he blesses you extravagantly! He shows you *hesed* with his transcendent love and loyalty. Does he give you thirty-five servants? No, he gives you legions of angels! Does he restore to you the land of Saul? No, he'll restore to you all creation! In advance of that day, he moves you to "the heavenly Jerusalem," which will one day come down "out of heaven from God" (Hebrews 12:22, Revelation 21:2).

Until then, in anticipation of "the wedding supper of the Lamb," he grants you a seat at the King's table, his table, where you feast on bread and wine, which represent his body and his blood—where you feast on his never-ending, overflowing *hesed*, transcendent love and loyalty. He makes you a son. He makes you a daughter.

Now, how can you identify yourself by your limitations? How can you identify yourself as a victim? Legions of angels are serving you! The new creation is yours! You're a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem! You're eating at the king's table! Your cup runneth over!

If Jesus can heal the lame, as he does in the gospels, he can heal emotional cripples like us.

First, David turns to a son of Jonathan within Israel. Next, he turns to a son of another friend, this time outside Israel.

Hanun rejects David

2 Samuel 10:1-19:

After this the king of the Ammonites died, and Hanun his son reigned in his place. 2 And David said, "I will deal loyally with Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father dealt loyally with me." So David sent by his servants to console him concerning his father. And David's servants came into the land of the Ammonites. 3 But the princes of the Ammonites said to Hanun their lord, "Do you think, because David has sent comforters to you, that he is honoring your father? Has not David sent his servants to you to search the city and to spy it out and to overthrow it?" 4 So Hanun took David's servants and shaved off half the beard of each and cut off their garments in the middle, at their hips, and sent them away. 5 When it was told David, he sent to meet them, for the men were greatly ashamed. And the king said, "Remain at Jericho until your beards have grown and then return."

6 When the Ammonites saw that they had become a stench to David, the Ammonites sent and hired the Syrians of Beth-rehob, and the Syrians of Zobah, 20,000 foot soldiers, and the king of Maacah with 1,000 men, and the men of Tob, 12,000 men. 7 And when David heard of it, he sent Joab and all the host of the mighty men. 8 And the Ammonites came out and drew up in battle array at the entrance of the gate, and the Syrians of Zobah and of Rehob and the men of Tob and Maacah were by themselves in the open country.

9 When Joab saw that the battle was set against him both in front and in the rear, he chose some of the best men of Israel and arrayed them against the Syrians. 10 The rest of his men he put in the charge of Abishai his brother, and he arrayed them against the Ammonites. 11 And he said, "If the Syrians are too strong for me, then you shall help me, but

if the Ammonites are too strong for you, then I will come and help you. 12 Be of good courage, and let us be courageous for our people, and for the cities of our God, and may the Lord do what seems good to him.” 13 So Joab and the people who were with him drew near to battle against the Syrians, and they fled before him. 14 And when the Ammonites saw that the Syrians fled, they likewise fled before Abishai and entered the city. Then Joab returned from fighting against the Ammonites and came to Jerusalem.

15 But when the Syrians saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they gathered themselves together. 16 And Hadadezer sent and brought out the Syrians who were beyond the Euphrates. They came to Helam, with Shobach the commander of the army of Hadadezer at their head. 17 And when it was told David, he gathered all Israel together and crossed the Jordan and came to Helam. The Syrians arrayed themselves against David and fought with him. 18 And the Syrians fled before Israel, and David killed of the Syrians the men of 700 chariots, and 40,000 horsemen, and wounded Shobach the commander of their army, so that he died there. 19 And when all the kings who were servants of Hadadezer saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they made peace with Israel and became subject to them. So the Syrians were afraid to save the Ammonites anymore.

When David announces that he wants to deal “loyally” with Hanun, the Ammonite king, he uses the same word (*hesed*) that he used when he sought to show “kindness” to someone from the house of Saul. Evidently, David had some sort of relationship with Nahash, Hanun’s father, which began, perhaps, when he was fleeing from Saul. Saul and Nahash were adversaries, but David was friendly with Nahash (1 Samuel 11). Jonathan dealt loyally with David; likewise, Nahash has dealt loyally with David. David dealt loyally with Jonathan’s son; now he wants to deal loyally with Nahash’s son. He wants to show him *hesed*.

Hanun’s princes, however, don’t trust David and convince him that David has dispatched his servants in order to spy out the city. Hanun shames David’s servants, shaving off half their beards and cutting off their garments so as to expose their manhood (Isaiah 15:2; Jeremiah 41:5, 48:7). Hanun’s actions represent a declaration of war. Whereas Mephibosheth gratefully

received David’s overtures, Hanun spits in David’s face. Mephibosheth was weak and offered no defense. Hanun is the Ammonite king, and he’s strong—or at least he thinks he’s strong.

Now David’s servants have become like Mephibosheth, beset by a shameful condition. So that they won’t be further exposed, David instructs them to remain where they are, in Jericho, until their beards have grown. David covers their shame.

The Ammonites mobilize for war and hire mercenaries from other nations. David dispatches Joab, his general, and his army. Joab has to deal with a battle on two fronts, as the Ammonites and their mercenaries, led by the Syrians, divide their forces. Joab responds by dividing his forces, and giving half of the army to Abishai, his brother. Joab has thuggish tendencies, but he’s an exceptional general, which is at least one of the reasons David kept him around. Joab also inspires Abishai to trust the LORD.

Joab and Abishai prevail, and both the Ammonites and the Syrians flee. The Syrians, though, send for reinforcements, and this time David leads the Israelites into battle. The results are the same: the Syrians high-tale it. In the end, the Syrians have little choice but to make peace with the Israelites and become their subjects. The narrator concludes with an ironic understatement: “So the Syrians were afraid to save the Ammonites anymore.”

To trust or not to trust

Mephibosheth trusted David and received *hesed*. Hanun didn’t trust David and declared war. We have a choice, don’t we: to trust or not to trust? We have, perhaps, cause to be suspicious, to interpret overtures as threats, to assume sinister intentions. We have enough “princes” in our world advising us to be suspicious.

Some dismiss the overtures of the King. Some even declare war against him. In one sense, that’s what we’ve all done. At one point, all of us were enemies of God, as the apostle Paul puts it, rebel rulers of our own lives (Romans 5:10). As such, we’re responsible for the crucifixion of Christ, for he died for our rejection of God. As Hanun exposed and shamed the servants of David, we shamed and exposed the Son of David, because we wanted nothing to do with the rule of God.

Those who never trust the King and persist in their war against him leave him in the end with no choice, for when the kingdom comes in full, he will come not only to save but also to judge (Acts 10:42, 17:31). Before the

apostle John saw the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, he saw heaven opened to reveal the King, who is called “Faithful and True,” sitting on a white horse, “and in righteousness he judges and makes war” (Revelation 19:11). If you want nothing to do with the King, you don’t have to have anything to do with him. He makes overtures. But he will not coerce. He’s not that kind of king.

Brennan Manning writes of a man who wouldn’t allow any symbol of the crucified Christ his home. Why not?

*“I can’t stand the cross,” he says. “It is a denial of all that I value in life. I am a proud man, sensual; I seek pleasure. The cross reproaches me. It says, “You’re wrong. Your life must take this shape. This is the only true interpretation of life, and life is true only when it takes this form.”*³

On the one hand, he’s right: the cross means that we must let Christ shape our lives. On the other hand, consider what he’s missing out on: the King’s transcendent love and loyalty.

How do you know you can trust him?

Who do you want to be, Mephibosheth or Hanun? The King is showing you *hesed*: transcendent love and loyalty. Can you trust him? How do you know you can trust him? How does he come into his kingdom? He comes into his kingdom by dying on a cross for your sins. The King’s willingness to be crucified for us proves the purity of his intentions and disarms suspicions. Turns out that the reason that Brennan Manning’s friend dismisses the overtures of the King (the cross he dies on) is in fact the very reason we should trust him. Do not fear! The King not only spares you, he blesses you. He not only blesses you, he blesses you lavishly.

C.S. Lewis writes of how his wife in the end responded to the approach of God: “At last she gave in—I know how one puts it off—and faced Him. But the message was ‘I want to give you something,’ and instantly she entered into joy.”⁴ Indeed, the King wants to give you something. Does he ever! He wants to give you legions of angels, all creation, the heavenly Jerusalem. He wants to make you a son. He wants to make you a daughter. He wants to give you a seat at the table.

Be Mephibosheth! Fall before the King! Then pull up a chair!

Then find another Mephibosheth and invite him or her to the table. That person could have been you. That person was you, “separated from Christ,” “having no hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12).

Or, maybe you’re at war with God. You didn’t know you were at war with God; you simply thought you were indifferent. But now, perhaps, you can see: you’re Hanun. Your defenses are up. Your defenses have always been up. Now, perhaps, you can see: you have fought off the overtures of the King. Can you sense his approach? He’s at your elbow. What does he want? He wants to give you something. He wants to give you everything! Trust him! Enter into joy!

Endnotes

¹ Lewis, C.S. *A Grief Observed*. New York: Bantam Books. 1976. 55.

² Bruce Springsteen and The E Street Band. “Born in the U.S.A.” *Born in the U.S.A.* Columbia Records, 1984. CD.

³ Manning, Brennan. *The Signature of Jesus*. Portland: Multnomah Press. 1992. 33.

⁴ Lewis. *op cit*. 55.

