

## The Power of Kindness

**2 Samuel 9:1-12** Then David said, "Is there anyone left of the family of Saul, to whom I may show **kindness** because of Jonathan?" Now there was a servant in Saul's house whose name was Ziba. They called him to David, and the king said to him, "Are you Ziba?" And he said, "I am your servant." The king said, "Is there not still someone of the family 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 cannot walk because of his feet." So the king said to him, "Where is he?" Ziba answered the king, "See, he is in the family of Machir the son of Ammiel in Lo-debar." Then King David sent men to bring him from the family of Machir the son of Ammiel, from Lo-debar. Mephibosheth the son of Saul's son Jonathan came to David and fell on his face to the ground in respect. David said, "Mephibosheth." And he answered, "Here is your servant!" David said to him, "Do not be afraid. For I will be sure to show **kindness** to you because of your father Jonathan. I will return to you all the land of your grandfather Saul. And you will eat at my table always." Again Mephibosheth put his face to the ground and said, "Who am I? Why should you care for a dead dog like me?" Then the king called Saul's servant Ziba and said to him, "I have given to your owner's grandson all that belonged to Saul and his family. You and your sons and your servants will grow food on the land for him. You will bring in the food so your owner's grandson may eat. But Mephibosheth your owner's grandson will always eat at my table." Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. Then Ziba said to the king, "Your servant will do all that my lord the king tells your servant to do." So Mephibosheth ate at David's table as one of the king's sons. Mephibosheth had a young son whose name was Mica. And all who lived in Ziba's house were Mephibosheth's servants.

In this passage of scripture, David was at the pinnacle of his power. Saul, who had persecuted him, had died. The remains of Saul's influence in the Kingdom was waning and David's influence was growing. The ark had been recovered and was back at the centre of things in the City of David and David had cleared up all opposition by defeating the Philistines, the Moabites, and Hadadezer (from whom he captured 1000 chariots). The Arameans were now subject to him. He struck down 18000 Edomites in a major battle...and so on and so on. It says, "*The Lord gave David victory wherever he went.*"

David now had time to reflect on things and it seems that his mind went back to the most awful conflict of all, the one that must have produced the most turmoil in his soul, the civil war between himself and Saul, (which was not of his making), the unjustified persecution by Saul and the loss of his great friend Jonathan, Saul's son. With whom, in the good old days, he had fought alongside and whom he dearly loved, despite the antagonism of Saul towards him.

When Jonathan died on the battlefield with Saul, David (great man that he was), grieved for them both - but of Jonathan he said, "*I grieve for you Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women.*" I don't for one moment think that there was anything improper in David and Jonathan's relationship, this kind of affection between two men is very rare but very special and it involves a bond forged through the experiences of life and a degree of transparency with one another that involves risk. By that I mean the willingness to open oneself up to another, and especially those areas of hurt or confusion, and to be able to do so without fear. Without the risk of being exposed! Very rare but very beautiful.

So in these quiet moments, David is not thinking, *"is there anyone left of the house of Saul I can hunt down and kill"* but *"Is there anyone left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?"* David was an incredible man. A giant of a man. He could show utter ruthlessness when needed and yet extraordinary kindness and tenderness when the moment called for it. He was the kind of man you had to make a decision about, to like him or loathe him, to want him to be King or to get rid of him. But one thing's sure, you could not be in the vicinity of David and be indifferent to him. Oh how we need more Davids in today's churches!

Well, there was a previous servant of Saul in David's household called Ziba and he was asked that question, and he said, *"Yes, there is one of Jonathan's sons left but he is crippled in both his feet"* Imagine the emotion stirred in David's heart when he heard that. A son of Jonathan, his great friend, still alive. *"Go and fetch him"*, he said, and so Mephibosheth was brought to David. I suppose he was carried as he was lame and helpless in that way. He must have wondered why David wanted to see him and what fate would await him for as Saul's grandson and heir, he had been in hiding. Yes, Mephibosheth, since the death of others, was now actually heir to Saul's old throne and kingdom. Surely David would get rid of him too? Surely, you would have!

Mephibosheth arrived in fear and prostrated himself in front of David. David spoke his name, uttered, I believe, with great kindness and compassion. "Mephibosheth." I am sure that just the way David spoke his name and his tone of voice would put him more at ease. David went on to say that for the sake of his Father and great friend Jonathan he would restore all his lands to him and Ziba and his family would serve Mephibosheth from that point onward.

Mephibosheth was overwhelmed, *"Why should you do this for a dead dog like me?"* he asked. David went further, *"Not only will I restore your lands, but you shall eat at my table"* he said, and so Mephibosheth ate at the Kings table from that day onward, just like one of the Kings own sons.

Isn't this a beautiful picture of the Gospel and the way the kindness of God has reached out to us all? This was unwarranted kindness, undeserving kindness to a fearful man, crippled and almost helpless. He knew he was on the wrong side, and out of favour. History was against him he had hidden himself away. If you remember, Adam did that after he had sinned, he immediately hid himself among the trees of the garden.

Well, haven't we all been on the wrong side far from God? Can you really deny that there is something unrighteous in the world (and in you and me), which makes us wholly incompatible with the holy presence of God? You may not feel you have sinned very much or that there is anything criminal, immoral or notorious in your history that anyone can point to, and that you have led a pretty good life. Perhaps like the Pharisee, even thanking God that you are not as bad as others! Well if we think like that, we deceive ourselves. You and I belong to a fallen race, for *"We have all sinned and come short of Gods glory."*

Have you not hidden from God? I have. I hid in the music business. Others hide in family life, others in sport, others in politics, and some even in religion. Others just in lots of activity, keeping busy, fearful of death but still putting off the moment when they have to be honest with God - a Saviour God named Jesus Christ. Crippled? Unable to walk properly? Life constantly going wrong? Not sure of your footing? Damaged in childhood in someway? Had a bad experience and still not properly healed? Lacking in confidence? Every one of us has a story to tell! Let me encourage you, God wants to be kind to you (and to me) today. David

exhibits the Spirit of Christ here. Go and fetch him he says. Has not God sought and fetched us in the person of Jesus. What a journey that was to fetch us. It involved leaving heaven's glory, coming into this very place of sin, working in it, labouring in it. The awfulness of sin pressed in upon the spirit of Jesus every day and finally, he was made the very thing itself, *"Made sin"*, so that God could satisfy the requirements of his holiness in punishing sin - whilst sin was being borne by Jesus.

***"The Just for the unjust, to bring us to God"*** the scripture says. David fetched Mephibosheth and when he arrived he called him by name "Mephibosheth". He calls each of us by name. We are not saved in batches. Perhaps he is looking at someone here this evening and calling your name. We cannot take anything for granted. Well, Mephibosheth is going to eat at David's table from now on, as a saved sinner? Yes, but more than that...as one of the King's sons. The **kindness of God** elevates. It is important to understand that. It doesn't patronise us and keep us in some kind of subservient state, constantly mourning our sinful past. We need to understand that in our dealings with one another too. Don't patronise! When you have done a kindness, don't leave the other person feeling awkward. I find that a very unacceptable. The scripture says, *"God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love whereby He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, has raised up together and made us sit down together in heavenly places in Christ that in the ages to come He may show the exceeding riches of His grace, in kindness towards us through Christ Jesus"*

Titus speaks of the ***"Kindness and love to man of our Saviour God"*** Well David fails badly after this and soon finds himself an outcast, fighting for survival outside of Jerusalem and at one point, Ziba, whom David had told to care for and serve Mephibosheth, came to meet David. He had lots of supplies for David and his men. What a nice man he was, wasn't he? Or was he?..... No, he was a horrible little man, little in moral stature anyway. David says, *"Where is Mephibosheth, why hasn't he come with you?"* Ziba says, *"He stayed in Jerusalem because he thinks that now you are disgraced, the people will give him back his grandfather Saul's kingdom."* Well, that just wasn't true. Nasty, nasty little man! In a few words he tried to get favour with David and slandered the one person whose love for David was as true as his father Jonathan's love.

David was deceived and gave all that he had previously given Mephibosheth to Ziba. Well, David was at a very low point. Be careful of people who publicly proclaim their support for you or for the leader at any given time. It may well be genuine, and there are many examples of that in scripture, but other times it doesn't ring true and it tends to defile everyone who hears it. The trick is discerning which is which. Personally, I avoid mutual admiration societies like the plague. ***"A man that flatters his neighbour spreads a net for his feet."*** Ziba represents the kind of man who thinks he can ingratiate himself with God and at the same time put himself forward. He is creepy! It won't work to try to creep round God. ***"All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags"*** - scripture tells us. The way to God's heart is through repentance, and then to serve Him out of love, not to flaunt yourself and try to gain favour with Him. Do you really think that God doesn't know when people are having Him on?

That extraordinary scripture in **1 Corinthians 13** has a bearing on this. You can give to charity, surrender your body to the flames, do things that everyone would applaud, ***"but if I have not love I am nothing"***, Paul says. It is the same scripture which tells us that ***"love is kind."*** It is good to serve the Lord, but as soon as the thought of reward enters your head, or that you can in some way ingratiate yourself with God or those around you, it

ceases to be true service. I find that a very distasteful area of church life.

Well, David eventually returned to Jerusalem and Mephibosheth came to meet him. David challenged him, *"Why didn't you come with Ziba to help me?"* And so we learn that Mephibosheth had wanted to come with Ziba that day but Ziba had betrayed Mephibosheth and had gone off without him - and then slandered him to David. We read that such was Mephibosheth's love for David that all the while David was away, he had not dressed his feet, trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes. That was his way of grieving for David and he longed for David's return. It would have meant reproach, probably being laughed at. Yet he did it anyway!

However, David was not fully recovered yet and not really clear who was telling the truth, so he said, *"Ok then, you can divide everything between you."* Mephibosheth's response shows the kind of man he was compared to Ziba. *"Ziba can have everything for all I care, I only care that you are home again and safe,"* Mephibosheth said. What a man! What a great love he had for David! That is the difference between the true effect of Divine Grace working deep in the soul and the opportunist on the fringe of Divine Grace. *"I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."* This is what Paul said (**Philippians 3:8**), a man saturated with God's grace.

I commend the **kindness of God** to you this evening. However, if you are to really experience Divine Grace, you must first recognise that you are as undeserving as Mephibosheth, and that God has found you, fetched you, given you a place at His table as a son or daughter - and shown you undeserved and great kindness.

So let me assure you of this, whatever your state, however you feel, if you turn to Him, every time you turn to Him, I can promise you that He will deal kindly with you (as He has with me over the years) and so many others here today. Let me read that scripture again. *"God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, has raised us up together and made us sit down together in heavenly places in Christ that in the ages to come He may show the exceeding riches of His grace, in kindness towards us through Christ Jesus"* (**Ephesians 2:4-7**).