

David and Mephibosheth

II Samuel

4: 14

9: 1-13

16: 1-4

19: 24-30

21: 7

We want to spend some time considering the story of David and Mephibosheth and to draw some lessons from the experience of Mephibosheth in particular.

First of all, though, let us briefly go through the history of what actually took place. We first read of Mephibosheth in II Samuel 4. There we learn of what happened to him when he was just a boy. He was only five years old when news came to his home of the death of his father Jonathan and his grandfather Saul – killed in a battle with the Philistines. When the boy's nurse hears of this tragedy, she picks up the boy to flee from the house. In her panic, however, she drops the child, and he became lame on both his feet. He was therefore a cripple for the rest of his days.

We hear nothing more of Mephibosheth until II Samuel chapter 9. There we learn that he is living in the house of a man called Machir, in Lo-Debar. But at the beginning of the chapter, David asked the question, "Is there any left of the house of Saul that I may show him the kindness of God for Jonathan's sake". David is wanting to show kindness to the house of his former enemies. He sends for a man called Ziba who informs David of the presence of a man called Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, in Lo-Debar. David expresses his intentions to Mephibosheth who is overwhelmed that David should take note of him. He says, "What is thy servant that you should take note of such a dead dog as I".

David however proceeds and Mephibosheth is first given back all the wealth that once belonged to the house of Saul. Ziba, along with his sons and his servants, is commanded by David to till the land of Mephibosheth on his behalf, but Mephibosheth himself is brought to the king's table and is treated as one of the king's sons.

So it continued until David's son Absalom rose up in rebellion against him and the king has to flee the city of Jerusalem. On the way he meets Ziba who tells David a lie – that Mephibosheth has stayed behind with the hope that the house of Israel would restore to him the throne of Saul. David believes Ziba and gives him all the wealth that belonged to Mephibosheth.

Soon however Absalom is slain and David is restored to the throne. When he returns, he is met by Mephibosheth who has been in a state of mourning since the day that David left. The lie of Ziba is exposed but strangely, David does not take all the possessions back from Ziba – only a half. Mephibosheth however tells David to let Ziba have it all. He was content simply to know that the king had returned again in peace to his house.

The last part of our story concerns David and the Gibeonites. Here was a people who had made a covenant with Joshua when the children of Israel had entered the land for the first time. Saul however had persecuted them and they came to David seeking vengeance for the wrongs which they had suffered. David therefore gave them seven sons of Saul whom they then slew, but Mephibosheth was spared by David.

This then briefly is the story of David and Mephibosheth. What we have to do now is to try and learn some lessons for ourselves from the things that took place.

We wish to consider the dealings that David had with this man Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul. I think we can see in Mephibosheth a picture of ourselves both as sinners before conversion and as saints thereafter. We can therefore see also David as a picture of the Lord Jesus in the way that David brings this man into the blessing of the king. As with all types, however, they can never match perfectly the reality of Christ, hence we have to consider also a different lesson to be learned in the treachery of Ziba, who told lies about Mephibosheth and thus robbed him of his inheritance.

Let us consider the following points :-

1. **Mephibosheth – before his call by David**
 1. His early days
 2. The meaning of his name
 3. Samuel's judgment upon the house of Saul
 4. The enmity of the house of Saul
 5. The house of Machir in Lo-Debar
2. **David blesses Mephibosheth**
 1. David's promise to Jonathan
 2. David's forgiving spirit
 3. David gives him the place of a son
 4. David gives him a place at his table
3. **The deception of Ziba**
 1. David believes the lie
 2. Mephibosheth is restored
4. **David preserves the life of Mephibosheth**

1.1. The early days of Mephibosheth

II Samuel 4:4

And Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son that was lame of his feet. He was five years old when the tidings came of Saul and Jonathan out of Jezreel, and his nurse took him up, and fled: and it came to pass, as she made haste to flee, that he fell, and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth.

The lad was but five years old when news came through to the household of the death of Saul and Jonathan. The nurse took up the lad to flee in haste, but she dropped the child and he became lame on both his feet. This fact that he was lame is mentioned several times in the narrative of II Samuel. It is bit like Nicodemus of whom it is recorded 3 times in John's gospel that he came to Jesus by night.

Here then was a child who had a most unfortunate beginning in life as a result of the misfortunes of another. His tragic accident came about as the result of the failure of Saul his grandfather. His whole life was affected by the failure of another. This is true, not only of us individually, but of the whole of humanity. Romans 5:19 says of Adam :-

For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

Death passed upon all men for that all have sinned. In David's Psalm of repentance, Psalm 51, he writes in verse 5, "Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me". As we come into the New Testament, we read in Ephesians chapter 2 of the condition of all men before they are converted. "We were "dead in trespasses and in sins". We were all like Mephibosheth – we have had a bad start in life and it has affected us all our lives.

The same portion in Ephesians also reminds us of how we once walked. Regarding these sins, "wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience". What would be the characteristics of the course of this world? When the Lord spoke of the last days, the days of the Son of man, He compared them with the days of two men from the past – Noah and Lot. "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be in the days of the Son of man. Men were eating and drinking , marrying and giving in marriage until the day that Noah entered into the ark and the flood came and took them all away". What marked the days of Noah was the spirit of indifference. Men were so preoccupied with their everyday things that they had forgotten God. They ignored the construction of the ark and the preaching of Noah, and they did so to their cost. The days of Lot, on the other hand, were marked by gross immorality – especially that of homosexuality – and because of this, the judgment of God fell upon Sodom. Because of indifference and immorality, the judgment of God will fall upon this world in the not too distant future.

1.2. Mephibosheth – the meaning of his name

This man's name means "utterance of Baal". The link with Baal is defined even more by an alternative rendering of his name in I Chronicles 8:34 where we read, "The son of Jonathan was Meri-Baal".

It might seem incredible to us that a man like Jonathan who spoke so much about the Lord in I Samuel 20 (6 times over), could have a son whose name means "utterance of Baal". It underlines how prominent was Baal worship in Israel in the days of David and subsequent kings. It always was there under the surface although it came to a head in the days of Ahab and Jezebel. On Mount Carmel, Elijah was faced with no fewer than 400 priests of Baal and he alone stood for the Lord. He challenged them to bring down Baal to light the fire around the sacrifice but they failed for Baal is no god at all. Today we have much Christian profession. Many call upon the name of the Lord who know Him not. It is just another form of Baal worship. Jonathan's inconsistency with the Lord and with Baal can sometimes mark even us. There are many things we do for God, but sometimes God is set aside as we go our own way.

As we bring this thought into the New Testament, we see a parallel in Ephesians chapter 2. There we read of "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience". He is called "the prince of the power of the air" because today he is invisible to men. But just as the air is unseen, we can see the effects of the wind in the trees and in the sea. Today, Satan is an unseen force, but he is no less real and powerful. The whole world now lies in the wicked one. He is the god of this world who blinds the minds of them that believe not. Mephibosheth therefore had a name that linked him with the heathen god, Baal.

Our link with Satan has been broken through salvation. According to Colossians chapter 1, we have been delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of the son of His love. Satan has no power over the child of God. James says in his epistle, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you". In Ephesians chapter 6, we are to put on the whole armour of God that we may be able to stand in the evil day. Our main piece of defence is the word of God. This is what the Lord used in His temptation in the wilderness and at the end of it, the devil departed from Him for a season.

1.3. Samuel's judgment upon the house of Saul

In the natural course of events, Jonathan would have inherited the throne of Saul his father, and Mephibosheth would have inherited it from Jonathan. In I Samuel 13, however, we read of the first act of disobedience on the part of Saul. He should have waited seven days for Samuel to appear in order to make a sacrifice to God, but because Israel was being hard pressed by the Philistines, he decided to go ahead without Samuel. As a result of this act of disobedience, Samuel says to Saul in I Samuel 13:13-14 :

"Now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever
But now thy kingdom shall not continue"

Can we not see a parallel again with Ephesians chapter 2:12?

12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:

As Gentiles, before conversion, we faced all the limitations that Mephibosheth had. We were without hope, without God in the world. As Gentiles, we had no claim upon God at all but were under His condemnation.

1.4. The enmity of the house of Saul

From the time of David's anointing by Samuel in I Samuel 16, there was enmity between the house of Saul and the house of David. Ephesians 2 also speaks of the enmity that existed between Jew and Gentile.

16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

1.5. The house of Machir in Lo-Debar

Prior to his call by David, Mephibosheth was living in a place called Lo-Debar
II Samuel 9:4

4 And the king said unto him, Where is he? And Ziba said unto the king,
Behold, he is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lodebar.

It is commonly translated as a "place of no pasture". It is a picture again of the sinner in the world. There is nothing in the world to meet his spiritual needs, to feed him in divine things. The world is a wilderness as far as divine truth is concerned.

But there is a man named in this verse who is worthy of some consideration. Mephibosheth was in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel. Here was a man who sheltered Mephibosheth before he had any wealth or possessions, or any place before David or before God. Machir gave Mephibosheth a place of shelter when he had no means to repay him. But the kindness of Machir has not gone unseen by God and hence his name and his work have gone down in scripture for all generations to see. Machir showed the same kindness that David did later.

This kindness to strangers will also not go un-noticed by the Lord in a future day. In what has become known as "the judgment of the living nations" in Matthew 25, the Lord says to the sheep on His right hand, "Forasmuch as ye have done it unto one of these, the least of my brethren, ye have done it unto Me".

In his third epistle, John commends the hospitality of Gaius. He says to him, "Thou doest well, whatsoever thou doest to the brethren and to strangers". He was a man who opened his home to the Lord's servants as they passed through his city. This would perhaps bring him into contention with Diotrophes. He would not receive these brethren in the church and was casting out of the church those that would. But Gaius receives the praise of John. God sees such service and he will reward in a future day.

Machir is also mentioned in II Samuel 17:27. He is in fact one of three men in the verse – Shobi, Machir, and Barzillai. All three gave food and sustenance to David as he is fleeing from the rebellion of Absalom. Barzillai is mentioned again in II Samuel 19, as one who brought the king back, but I have no doubt that Machir will have his reward. Many will run after a man who is a rising star but few would support a man who appears to be on the way out. Machir supported Mephibosheth when he was a no-body and David when he was an outcast. The Lord is not unrighteous to forget such work.

2. David blesses Mephibosheth

In II Samuel 9:1, David asks a most remarkable question. "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?"

I believe we can see in the actions of David a picture of what the Lord Jesus has done for us as saints. Again we can compare many of the experiences of Mephibosheth with those of ourselves, especially in the epistle to the

Ephesians.

What was it then that prompted David to show such kindness to this poor lame man? It was I believe far more than just the milk of human kindness. We wish to consider a number of reasons and the first of these has to do with the covenant that Jonathan made with David in I Samuel chapter 20.

2.1. David's promise to Jonathan

After Saul has made another attempt on the life of David, Jonathan makes a covenant with his friend David. In this covenant, Jonathan is seeking a promise from David. We read about it in I Samuel 20:15

15 But also thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever: no, not when the LORD hath cut off the enemies of David every one from the face of the earth.

1. So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, Let the LORD even require it at the hand of David's enemies.

Jonathan made David swear that he would care for his seed from that day forward . Hence, in seeking out the remnant of Saul's seed, David was in fact fulfilling the promise he had made all these years earlier. Our God, likewise, keeps His promises. Ephesians chapter 1 tells us that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. We are the objects of divine choice – God has kept his eternal promise.

Satan and his agents, however, do not keep their covenants. This is especially true of Israel and the Beast in the last days. The Beast, the last great Gentile ruler, will make a covenant with Israel. The nation will hope to receive two things. One is protection from the King of The North, "The overflowing scourge". According to Isaiah 28, Israel will make "a covenant with death", but the covenant will not stand and the Beast will not be able to protect them. He has made a covenant that he cannot keep. Part of the covenant also will guarantee Israel's right to worship in their newly built temple. But "in the midst of the week", three and a half years after signing the covenant, the Beast will cause the covenant to cease, and He as God will sit in the temple of God and show himself that he is God.

2.2. David's forgiving spirit

The covenant between Jonathan and David would have been of no effect had it not been for the forgiving spirit of David towards the house of Saul. In II Samuel chapter 1, David laments the passing of Saul and Jonathan. "Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives". One could have understood it if David had said this of his friend Jonathan but to include Saul in this statement is quite remarkable, considering the bitter enmity that Saul had towards himself over many years. David showed the same forgiving spirit later towards Abner and then Ishbosheth.

Returning to Mephibosheth, David's kindness came at a time when he had just ascended the throne. Would he use his new-found power to root out all his enemies? Far from it! He now proceeds to show them the kindness of God.

Our God also has shown the same forgiveness towards us.

"Forgiving one another even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us"

We had sinned grievously towards Him, but He has had a big enough heart to forgive us all our sins. The Lord Jesus showed much of this spirit in His lifetime. In Luke chapter 7, He is the house of Simon the Pharisee when a woman enters the house. She is called "a woman of the city which was a sinner". She was well known to the host. The woman falls down behind the Lord Jesus, rains her tears upon His feet, wipes His feet with her hair, and anoints them with ointment. This is too much for Simon who says within himself, "This man if He were a prophet would have known who and what manner of woman this is". But the Lord did know and He says of her "Her sins which are many are forgiven her. She was forgiven much, for she loved much". He had forgiven this woman of doubtful character. In Luke chapter 19, He went to the home of Zacchaeus, much to the annoyance of some who muttered, "He is gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner". But the Lord said later that day, "This day is salvation come to this house". Think too of the forgiveness shown by the Lord at Calvary. He prays for the Roman soldiers who were in the process of crucifying Him, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do".

Such then was the forgiving spirit of the Lord Jesus. The Christian, therefore, is to have the same spirit especially towards our brethren. Indeed, forgiveness is an evidence of the reality of our salvation. In Matthew 18:21, Peter asked the Lord the question, "How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times? The Lord's reply is, "Until seventy times seven". In other words, there should be no end to our forgiveness. The Lord proceeds to tell the parable of a servant who was forgiven a debt of ten thousand talents but then refused to forgive one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred pence, but rather cast him into prison. The lord of the first servant was angry and delivered him to the tormentor until he had repaid all. Likewise we, who have been forgiven a multitude of sins by the Lord, must forgive those who trespass against us.

2.3. Mephibosheth is given the place of a son

In II Samuel 9:8, Mephibosheth "bowed himself and said, What is thy servant that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I". Mephibosheth was little in his own eyes. At best he was a servant, at worst he was a dead dog.

When the Lord first called His disciples, they were happy indeed to be called His servants. They would have counted it a privilege to serve. The Queen of Sheba said to Solomon, "Happy are thy servants". The disciples were happy to be servants also. But there came the day when the Lord said to them, "Henceforth I call you not servants. I have called you friends, for a servant knoweth not what his master doeth". It was the Lord's great pleasure to reveal His thoughts to those who were now His friends. In Luke chapter 10, we read of the one and only occasion when the Lord rejoiced on earth. He prays thus to the Father, "I thank Thee Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for it was well pleasing in Thy sight". Divine persons were

rejoicing together at their revelation of divine truth to such as you and me. So the disciples had been servants, then friends, now they were babes.

God has done everything possible to reveal Himself to us. He has given us eternal life, and as the Lord prays in John chapter 17, "This is life eternal that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent". He has also sent us the Spirit of truth to reveal to us His ways and to glorify Christ. Last of all, the ascended Christ has sent evangelists, pastors and teachers to bring us to the unity of the faith, the unity of the body of truth.

Finally in John 20, they became His brethren. In verse 17, He says to Mary Magdalene, Go to my brethren and say unto them, "I ascend unto My Father and your Father, unto My God and your God". We are His brethren. God is our Father, and we are His sons.

We might have been like Mephibosheth – happy to be His servants – but God has called us to be His sons. This is brought out beautifully in the parable of the prodigal son. As he began his journey, he was rehearsing what he would say to his father when he got home. Luke 15:18-19 records, "I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants". When the son reaches home, he begins his little speech. "I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son". At this point the father interrupts him. He is not allowed to make his final request, "Make me as one of thy hired servants". Rather the Father says to his servants, "This my son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found".

Perhaps many of us are happy to be servants of God, but have failed to grasp the significance of being His sons. Just how near to God does sonship put us? We find the answer to this question in Ephesians chapter 1. God has chosen us in Christ that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. The expression "before Him" has the sense of "in the immediate presence of". The preposition used is KATENOPION which means literally "hard up against". How near then are we to God? In Luke 1:19, Gabriel says to Zacharias, "I am Gabriel that stand in the presence of God". Gabriel used the Greek preposition ENOPION, "in the presence of". Putting Luke chapter 1 side by side with Ephesians chapter 1, we can deduce that the Christian is nearer to God than even the highest angel in angel. If Gabriel stands as a courtier in the king's palace, then we are seated in the king's palace as His sons. We are seated in the heavenlies in Christ.

2.4. David gives him a place at his table

Mephibosheth is given the honour and the glory of a king's son. David restores to him all the wealth and the possessions of his grandfather Saul. He is given Ziba to be his servant, a man who himself had fifteen sons and twenty servants. But not content with this, David invited him to dwell with him in Jerusalem. "For he did eat continually at the king's table".

We have been making a number of comparisons in our study between old and new testaments – especially with Ephesians. Do we not see another parallel here? We have been "blessed with every kind of spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ". These blessings are spiritual and they are unconditional.

They are listed for us in Ephesians chapter 1.

1. Chosen in Him before the foundation of the world
2. Before Him in love
3. Predestinated unto sonship
4. Accepted in the beloved
5. Redemption through His blood
6. The forgiveness of sins
7. The mystery of His will revealed
8. An inheritance received

Truly we are seated as sons at the king's table.

3. The deception of Ziba

Up until now, we have seen in Mephibosheth a picture of the sinner before and after conversion, and in David we can see a picture of the Lord. But in II Samuel chapter 16, an incident happens which we can only deal with in a separate issue. The thing about types is that they can never match perfectly the Person they depict.

As David is fleeing from Absalom, he is met by Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth, bearing bread, raisins, fruit, and wine. David asks the question, "And where is thy master's son?" To this, Ziba replied, "He abideth at Jerusalem, for he said, 'Today shall the house of Israel restore me the kingdom of my father'". It was a blatant lie, of course, but David believes Ziba and gives him all the wealth of Mephibosheth.

It underlines the fact that we should never be too hasty in coming to decisions about others, especially if what we are hearing seems to be totally out of character. Before we make up our mind, both sides of the story should be heard. The law stated, "In the mouth of two or three witnesses, let every word be established". Christianity has by no means set aside this rule. Indeed, Paul mentions it in I Timothy 6:19. "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses". David should therefore have waited before making such a hasty decision. Had not Mephibosheth been a guest at his table? Had not this man cause to be grateful to David?

How often do we hear stories about our brethren and sisters, and we immediately jump to conclusions before we have heard both sides of the argument. If a story seems incredulous, then we should treat it as such until we have the definite proof. Hence, in our case, David doubted Mephibosheth. The story of Ziba and Mephibosheth takes one step forward when David is restored to the throne. Mephibosheth comes to meet David. He had "neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes from the day the king departed until the day he came again in peace". Mephibosheth pleads his case and David accepts his word, yet Ziba is allowed to keep half of the wealth of Mephibosheth. Mephibosheth cares little for it. He says more or less, "let him keep the lot". The important thing was, "The king is come again in peace unto his own house"

It is impossible to make any application for us from the episode. It is a less than satisfactory incident in David's life. Fortunately, David's Lord knows about everything and is not deceived. Christ will never have to redeem His mistakes.

Paul found himself in the same position as Mephibosheth. Aspersions were cast upon him by many. The Corinthians accused Paul of not being an apostle and some accused him of serving the Lord for monetary gain. He writes in II Timothy that all they in Asia had forsaken him. Paul however was content to leave the final assessment to the Lord Himself who sees everything and will judge righteously. "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day".

Surprisingly, then, Ziba gets away with half of his ill-gotten gains. Other men in David's life got their come-uppance, if not from David then later from Solomon. Thus it happened to Joab, to Shimei, and Adonijah. Our Lord however will make no exceptions and will make no mistakes.

4. David preserves the life of Mephibosheth

We read of an incident in II Samuel that seems horrific to our senses in 2009. The Gibeonites felt aggrieved at the treatment they had received from Saul. David hands over seven sons from the house of Saul, including five sons of Michal. But David spares the life of Mephibosheth.

We are kept by divine persons. In John 17, the Lord says that while He was in the world, He kept them in His Father's name. But now that He was leaving this world, He was handing them over to the Father to keep them in the world.

There are some Christians in our day who would dare to tell us that we could lose our salvation - "saved today, lost tomorrow". But what does the Bible have to say on the matter?

1. Eternal life

In John chapter 10, the Lord says, "I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish". The word "never" is a triple negative – literally "no, by no means, not unto the ages".

2. Divine hands

Again in John chapter 10, the Lord speaks of two hands that are keeping us – His hand and then the Father's hand. These hands are keeping us today.

3. The family of God

In John chapter 1, we read, "But to as many as received as Him, to them gave He the power to become the children of God". We are part of the family of God, and you cannot cease to be part of a family once you belong to it.

4. Names written in heaven

In Luke chapter 10, the Lord said, "Rejoice therefore because your names are written in heaven". Nothing can alter the fact that our names are in heaven, in the Lamb's book of life.