

## A Godlike Kindness

### 2 Samuel 9

At breakfast, a woman said to her husband, "I bet you don't remember what day this is." He knew that he was probably busted, but he bluffed indignantly, "Of course I remember what day it is!" as he headed to the office.

At 10 A.M., the doorbell rang. When the woman opened the door, she was handed a dozen long stemmed red roses. At 1 P.M., a two-pound box of her favorite chocolates arrived. Later, a boutique delivered a designer dress.

The woman couldn't wait for her husband to come home. "First the flowers, then the chocolates, and then the dress!" she exclaimed. "This has been the best Groundhog Day ever!"

In our text, David was remembering things with a bit more clarity. He was thinking many years back to a covenant he had entered into with Jonathan, his own dearest friend, but who also just happened to be the son of the man who was trying to kill him. In this covenant, they promised that no matter how the future panned out, they would always deal kindly with the other's family. In the short-run, that would be a hard promise to keep as the house of David and the house of Saul were at war. Now, David was firmly established as king. In fact, he was at the height of his power when the old covenant became a burden on his heart. He wondered, "Is there no one still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show God's kindness?" (verse 3).

In the ancient world, to attribute a virtue to deity was simply a figure of speech for saying that the virtue was beyond the ordinary. David wanted to extend an extraordinary kindness to someone related to Saul because of his love for Jonathan. He did necessarily not see himself as a conduit of a gift from God. And yet, in extending this extraordinary kindness to a crippled grandson of Saul, David did illustrate the kindness of God Himself to sinners.

In spite of the sins and struggles of David, the shepherd and king of Israel, he is still presented in Scripture as an arch-type for a greater Shepherd and King. This great King of heaven made Himself known to us in the Person of Jesus, Who spoke often of His role as that of a shepherd. David was promised an everlasting kingdom. After David was long dead, his kingdom faltered. God's prophets began to speak of a descendant of David, One who would reestablish God's kingdom and rule it forever. So, it is not surprising that when we read of David's yearning to extend a godlike kindness to someone who had no reason to expect it, we cannot help but to think of the greater Shepherd-King Jesus and of God's grace that He brings to men.

### I. The Shepherd's Quest (1-4)

<sup>1</sup>David asked, "Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?"

<sup>2</sup>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.

<sup>3</sup>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."

<sup>4</sup>"Where is he?" the king asked.

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

## **A. David Remembered a Tender Friendship**

Jonathan was understandably reluctant to accept that his father really wanted to murder his best friend, but he promised to feel Saul out and to candidly report to David the true danger of the situation. Jonathan and David were in a field, discussing this matter when they affirmed their love and loyalty to one another by way of a sacred oath. Jonathan swore, "I will let you know if my Dad irreversibly is determined to have your hide, but you need to promise me something."

... <sup>14</sup> But show me unfailing kindness like that of the LORD as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, <sup>15</sup> and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family - not even when the LORD has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth." - 1 Samuel 20:14, 15

Now, Saul and Jonathan were dead, and David was king. As he reflected on the bond he had shared with Jonathan, he was no doubt deeply troubled by the fact that the work of consolidating the kingdom had required such violence against Jonathan's relatives. It may have already been too late to keep his promise to Jonathan. While Saul probably had a few assorted cousins and distant kinsmen still living in the land allotted to the tribe of Benjamin, who knew if a direct descendant of Saul, particularly one via Jonathan, was still around? After all, Saul's personal land holdings, his ancestral allotment, was being farmed by a former servant named Ziba.

If he was to ever know if a son of Jonathan survived, David must begin his quest by interviewing this servant. Ziba had to be a bit nervous when called before the king after all these years. David just wanted to know was if anyone was left, so Ziba told the king of Jonathan's son, who had for years been cared for by a kindly man from the other side of the Jordan River. Ziba felt compelled to tell David that this son was "crippled in both feet." He wanted David to know that the young man posed no threat to his throne, for no one in that day would follow a crippled king.

## **B. God Never Forgot His Tender Affection for Adam**

David wanted to keep a promise to His old friend, so he initiated a search to find someone on whom he might bestow Godlike kindness. How can we not think of the determination of the heavenly Father to bestow kindness on the fallen race of man, not because of some sentimental whim, but because of a purpose that is older than sin itself? Even as He was describing the curse that Adam and Eve had called down upon themselves, God hinted of a remedy to the disaster that was their sin. Adam's joyful work of the land would become a contentious struggle with thorns and thistles. Every time Eve passed a baby, she would think to herself, "What was I thinking that day in Eden?" But in the midst of all this, a promise of sin's undoing was announced when God said to the serpent:

<sup>15</sup>And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." - Genesis 3:15

Jesus spoke often of His Father's restorative plans for fallen people. On one occasion he used the motif of a loving Shepherd Who doggedly searched for a single lost sheep:

... <sup>4</sup>"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? <sup>5</sup>And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders <sup>6</sup>and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' " - Luke 15:4-6

## II. The Shepherd's Grace (5-8)

<sup>5</sup>So King David had him brought from Lo Debar, from the house of Makir son of Ammiel.

<sup>6</sup>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.

<sup>7</sup>"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."

<sup>8</sup>Mephibosheth bowed down and said, "What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?"

### A. David Broke the Mold for Eastern Kings

In that part of the world, when one dynasty gave way to another, the new king made very sure that no relatives of the previous king lived to cause any problems. Surely, Mephibosheth felt any such danger had passed. He had been living under the radar in an isolated area for years. Besides, he was crippled. He was five years old when his grandfather Saul and his father Jonathan were killed. Upon hearing of the deaths, a well-intentioned nurse snatched the child up to flee to a safer location, but she dropped him. That is when he became crippled. He was twelve when his uncle Ish-bosheth, Saul's son and short-lived successor to a portion of the crown was murdered.

Now, the best part of a decade had passed. Mephibosheth was a grown man with a child of his own. He must have been terrified to appear before David. The king sensed his fear and said, "Don't be afraid" ... "for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan." David defined what this kindness would look like. He would restore to this young man his grandfather's ancestral holdings. This was land to be worked, not ruled. But Mephibosheth was not capable of working the land. He would not need to. He would be exalted to the status of a nobleman. From this day forward, Mephibosheth would dine with David.

### B. God Simply Does Not Deal with Us as Our Sins Deserve

A couple went to a movie and saw that a man had brought his dog. What really amazed them was that the dog actually seemed to laughing during the funny parts. After the movie ended, they approached the unlikely pair. The husband said, "I'm astonished. It seems your dog actually enjoyed the movie."

"I was a bit surprised myself," replied the dog's owner, "because he hated the book."

Dogs did not have quite that standing in Jerusalem. Mephibosheth confessed to David: "What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?" A dog was a vile scavenger. A dead dog was just a disgusting, albeit harmless piece of road-kill. Once the fear of encountering David had passed, Mephibosheth was simply stunned. "Why are you doing this, my King?" These words echo the same amazed unworthiness that should hit us all in the face when we encounter the grace of God. Paul marveled at the grace that came to him as "the chief of sinners."

Jesus was never the kind of Shepherd-King to mistreat a sinner when he was already down. One prophet said, "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. (Isaiah 42:3). That means Jesus will find a way to use things that anyone else would simply discard. That is why He touched lepers, cleansing them and restoring them to their communities. That is why He confronted the demons of hell, who rendered their victims lunatics until Jesus set their minds right. That is why He intervened for an adulteress woman who others spoke of stoning. That is why He allowed another woman with a sullied reputation to wash his feet with her tears and dry them with her hair when the Pharisees standing by had her pegged as a tramp.

Jesus came to us not as a sinner, but as a human being, and as a particularly lowly one, so that He could speak to us about our sins, our weaknesses, our hurts and our struggles. David was a sinful man and a flawed king, but because of the role he played in God's redemptive plans, this encounter with Mephibosheth offers us a glimpse of the unmerited grace God brings to all of us.

### **III. The Shepherd's Goodness (9-13)**

<sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>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.)

<sup>11</sup>Then Ziba said to the king, "Your servant will do whatever my lord the king commands his servant to do." So Mephibosheth ate at David's table like one of the king's sons.

<sup>12</sup>Mephibosheth had a young son named Mica, and all the members of Ziba's household were servants of Mephibosheth. <sup>13</sup>And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king's table, and he was crippled in both feet.

#### **A. David Supplied Mephibosheth's Every Need**

Mephibosheth was taken care of personally, but what about his responsibilities? His son was too small to oversee Saul's lands, so David again summoned Ziba, Saul's old servant who had been keeping things up back on the farm. Ziba has prospered himself nicely under the current status quo (his numerous sons and servants evidence this). But now, his family is reinstated as the servants of Saul's household, and Ziba himself was specifically to function as the steward of Mephibosheth's interests. This probably rankled Ziba toward Mephibosheth on some level as will become evident in later chapters, but for now, he was as agreeable as a man could be in the presence of the mighty king.

Even the lineage of Saul would recapture a degree of its former dignity as a result of David's kindness to Mephibosheth. His little boy was named Mica. He would grow up to have a substantial number of descendants who in later biblical records would become leading men of the tribe of Benjamin. David's kindness was not a single token gesture to make the king feel good at that moment. It was a calculated effort to remember, rescue and restore a family name that had almost been eradicated from the earth. It was in every respect a godlike kindness.

## B. "... And I Shall Dwell in the House of the Lord Forever"

I wonder which of David's psalms was Mephibosheth's favorite. In Psalm 23, David adored the Shepherd-King of his own soul. He reflects that role in the life of Mephibosheth. "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." That first day Mephibosheth sat down to eat, every one there scrutinized this kinsman of Saul. "You anoint my head with oil." This gesture established that Mephibosheth was now an honored guest of the king - and more than a guest. They had better get used to having him around. "My cup overflows." This was as good as life could get for a man who had previously been an alien in his own land.

In the days of the judges, when the Israelites were clearing the Canaanites out of the territory of Simeon, they captured a king named Adoni-Bezek and cut off his thumbs and big toes. Such a king would no longer be able to grasp a weapon or march into battle. Evidently, this king had done the same to a number of kings in the region and taken them back to his house so as to amuse himself by how they struggled to feed themselves. The poetic justice was not lost on him:

Then Adoni-Bezek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off have picked up scraps under my table. Now God has paid me back for what I did to them." They brought him to Jerusalem, and he died there. - Judges 1:7

Ancient kings did this to other ancient kings to humiliate them. They were mere trophies of war whenever they were made to fumble about, picking up scraps from the conquering king's floor. What David did was to find a man who was an enemy by definition, a man who was already crippled. David would make that man as complete as it was within his power to make him. We sing a song that features a neat lyric: "*And here we stand, O Lord, as trophies of your grace.*" That's what Mephibosheth was, a trophy of David's grace and kindness, much as we are trophies of the grace of God.

How vividly the needs of Mephibosheth mirror our need for God. Here was a powerless enemy. He could no more disrupt David's reign in Jerusalem than we can threaten God's place in heaven. Still, we were "*enemies of God*" before the grace of God visited us. Mephibosheth lived far from the presence of his king. He was broken, weak and accustomed to his plight. But a royal benefactor sought him out and made him a son. In the same way: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1)

A few years ago a nationwide poll asked, "What phrase do you most like to hear uttered to you, sincerely?" The first phrase people wanted to hear was no surprise. "I love you." The second, "You are forgiven." Number three was a little surprising. "Supper is ready." It is interesting that the life of a crippled son of Jonathan was changed essentially by those assurances from a King.

"I love you. Before you were ever born, I loved your father. It only follows that I love you."  
"You are forgiven. Whatever has gone before is put to rest. We are at peace."  
"Supper is ready. You will always have a place at my table."

I hope you understand that your life need never be the same if you will trust that your Creator voices the very same assurances to you through the atoning gift of His Son, Jesus Christ.

"Before you ever saw the light of day, I have loved you."  
"Everything that has gone before is forgotten, for I have forgiven you."  
"The invitation is always open to fellowship with Me. Supper is ready."