

2 Samuel 9:1-13 (DHT)

And David said, “Is there anyone who is still left from the house of Saul, that I may show covenant faithfulness to for Jonathan’s sake?” There was a servant from the house of Saul whose name was Ziba, and when they had called him to David, the king said to him, “Are you Ziba?” And he said, “At your service.” And the king said, “Is there not someone still from the house of Saul, to whom I may show the covenant faithfulness of God?” And Ziba said to the king, “There is still a son of Jonathan who is lame in his feet.” So the king said to him, “Where is he?” And Ziba said to the king, “Behold, he is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lo-debar.” King David sent and brought him out of the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, from Lo-debar. And when Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan, son of Saul, had come to David, he fell on his face and prostrated himself. And David said, “Mephibosheth!” And he answered, “Behold, your servant.” So David said to him, “Do not fear, for I will surely show you covenant faithfulness for the sake of your father Jonathan, and will restore to you all the land of Saul your grandfather, and you shall eat bread at my table always.” And he prostrated himself and said, “What is your servant, that you should look upon a dead dog as I?”

The king called Ziba, servant of Saul, and said to him, “All that belonged to Saul and to all his house I have given to the son of your master. Therefore, you and your sons and your servants shall cultivate the land for him and you shall bring in the harvest, that the son of your master may have bread to eat. But Mephibosheth the son of your master shall always eat bread at my table.” Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. And Ziba said to the king, “According to all that my lord the king has commanded his servant, so will your servant do.” And as for Mephibosheth, he shall eat at my table, like one of the sons of the king. And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Mica. And all who dwelt in the house of Ziba were servants of Mephibosheth. So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem, for he ate always at the table of the king. And he was lame in both feet.

Context of David and Jonathan’s Friendship

Before we dive in, can I get you all to say this name with me: Mephibosheth? David and Jonathan have one of the premier friendships in the Bible, and I think their friendship is shown no better than through this character Mephibosheth. But before we get to Mephibosheth, we need to turn back the clock and consider the friendship of David and Jonathan. We are first introduced

to David in 1 Samuel 16. David was ruddy; he had beautiful eyes and was handsome (16:12). David had the Spirit of the Lord on him (16:13). David was a skilled musician, a man of valor, a man of war, and was wise (16:16-18). Saul favored David, set David in his service, and David’s service refreshed Saul (16:21-23).

David went on to famously defeat Goliath, and it was this encounter with Goliath that attracted Saul’s son Jonathan. After David’s defeat of Goliath, 1 Samuel 18 says Jonathan “knew” his soul to the soul of David (18:1). Jonathan made a covenant with David because Jonathan loved David more than even himself. Jonathan stripped himself of all his clothes and armor to give to David as a sign of his pledged loyalty (18:3-4). With the Spirit of the Lord and Jonathan’s covenant armor on him, David commanded the other men of war (18:5). Jonathan delighted in David so much that he warned David that his father Saul, who had become jealous of David, was trying to kill him (19:1-2). Jonathan swore he would tell David of any of his father’s plans (1 Sam. 19:3). Jonathan was caught between a rock and a hard place; between loyalty to his royal family and loyalty to his covenant friendship with David.

1 Samuel 20 offers some of the quintessential moments in their friendship. Jonathan insisted to David that his father Saul would not kill him without first telling him, yet David insisted Saul would not tell Jonathan because Saul knew how Jonathan really felt about David (1 Sam. 20:1-3). Jonathan promised to tell David of any harm coming for him, swearing in the name of YHWH that if he withheld anything from David, that whatever harm would befall David and more would instead fall on him. Jonathan offered to sacrifice himself for David (20:13). Jonathan asked David to swear to him in two different ways: the first if Jonathan lived, and the second if Jonathan died. When the Lord cuts off all of David’s enemies, if Jonathan lived, Jonathan wanted David to promise to show covenant-loyalty to Jonathan. And if Jonathan died, then he wanted David to promise to show covenant-loyalty to his household instead (20:14-15).

This is a strange request to us. In what universe could Jonathan possibly think he would be counted among the enemies of David? The custom in this era was that when a king from a new family took over, the entire household of the former king was put to death, in order for the new king to weed out any potential challenges to his throne. Jonathan knew this was inevitably coming and wanted David to withhold himself and his household from certain death. David swore to do just this, swearing by his love for Jonathan, loving Jonathan more than even himself

(20:17). Saul went on a rage because Jonathan chose covenant-loyalty to David over family-loyalty, but Jonathan remained resolute: David would be the next king, not himself (20:30-31).

Saul upped his game, pursuing David with more fury. The two arranged for Jonathan to gain knowledge of Saul’s plans and a game of archery for Jonathan to secretly communicate those plans to David. It became clear that Saul would seek to kill David and after Jonathan communicated this to him, David bowed before Jonathan, and they held each other, they kissed each other, and they wept together to say goodbye (20:41). It became clear to both men that Jonathan was going to die, so Jonathan reminded David of their covenant so both could be at peace in his death; reminding David to show covenant-loyalty even to his offspring (20:42). Saul’s resolve to kill David grew (1 Sam. 23:15). Jonathan risked his life to go to David one last time so he could strengthen him in the Lord before forfeiting his legal right to the throne (23:16-17). It is at this time when David and Jonathan made a covenant *together* before the Lord (23:18). Whereas Jonathan made a first covenant to David (1 Sam. 18), and then David made a second covenant to Jonathan (1 Sam. 20), here a third covenant is made with both, *together*.

Jumping ahead to 1 Samuel 28, there is a strange story of Saul sneaking off to see the witch at Endor to summon Samuel from the dead (28:8ff). When she does, Samuel told Saul that the Lord had torn the kingdom from his hand to give to David (28:17). Not only that, but Samuel said Saul and his sons would die the next day (28:19). The next day, Jonathan went into battle *knowing he would die*, yet he went valiantly knowing their deaths would pave the way for the Lord’s anointed, David, to arise to the throne. Jonathan and the other sons of Saul were killed in battle (1 Sam. 30:2), and then Saul took his own life (30:4).

2 Samuel 1 opens with David receiving word that Saul and Jonathan had been killed (1:5). In his mourning, David wrote a song, in which he called Jonathan his brother whose love far exceeded that of any woman (1:11, 26). 2 Samuel 2-5 portrays a violent struggle between those remaining in the household of Saul and David; a long war (3:1) in which Saul’s household was slowly killed off one by one. In the rush to escape, Jonathan’s son Mephibosheth fell and became lame (4:40). As a five year old, Mephibosheth’s life was turned upside down as he became a permanently physically-disabled orphan living in hiding. His name, meaning “from the mouth of shame,” truly defined his disabled, orphaned, fugitive existence. Although he could not even walk, he would forever be on the run.

2 Samuel 9

This brings us to our passage in 2 Samuel 9. By this point, David had defeated the enemies that stood in his way, the Ark of the Covenant had been brought to Jerusalem, the Lord had entered into a covenant with David, and David had taken his seat on the throne. It was at this time that David remembered his love and loyalty for Jonathan who gave up his life for David’s sake. David called Ziba, a holdover from Saul’s administration, and asked if there was anyone left from Saul’s house to whom David could show covenant-loyalty for the sake of Jonathan. This is a critical point. Fifteen years later, David was the king of Israel and Jonathan was dead. He swore he would show covenant-loyalty to Jonathan’s household by not totally cutting them off. Lo and behold, there is still *one* alive, and even better than a distant relative of Saul—the firstborn of Jonathan. Ziba told David this unnamed offspring of Jonathan lived in Lo-debar. This place was in the boondocks of the desert. This disabled, orphaned, fugitive was living his life of shame in the wilderness. But David summoned this unnamed offspring of Jonathan to Jerusalem and when this man came before David, David exclaimed “Mephibosheth!” Ziba never told David his name, yet at first sight *fifteen years later* David knew exactly who he was.

Mephibosheth knew he had to live in hiding, but he had been found. He surely thought he was summoned to be killed. Mephibosheth bowed in both reverence and fear to David. But instead of yelling, “Off with his head!” David instead tenderly spoke to Mephibosheth, “*Do not fear, for I will surely show you covenant-loyalty for the sake of your father.*” David gave Mephibosheth all the possessions seized from his grandfather Saul, but more importantly, Mephibosheth would always eat at the table of the king. This phrase is used four times in these thirteen verses. As a biblical theme, “eating” frequently demonstrates living in the presence, a type of hospitality much richer than a waiter or waitress gives you at a restaurant.

There is an “authentic-togetherness” involved with the theme of “eating” in the Bible, and this is no exception. David wanted Mephibosheth to never leave his presence in Jerusalem. Mephibosheth would always feast at David’s table in Jerusalem. Yet this crippled twenty year old would have no ability to manage his newfound wealth to survive. So David ordered Ziba’s servants to cultivate the land in perpetual service to Mephibosheth. As if things could not get any better, David again reiterated that Mephibosheth would always eat at the king’s table but he adds a critical detail in vs. 11. *Mephibosheth shall eat at my table, like one of the sons of the king.*

This is all because of the three covenants David and Jonathan made with each other out of their deep friendship and love for one another. The David-and-Jonathan narrative gives us one of the premier Biblical friendships. Theologian Gerry Breshears says that Biblical friendships possess physical affection, and a commonality of character, experience, and/or calling.¹ David and Jonathan are both depicted as warriors. David and Jonathan both trusted and walked with the Lord. David and Jonathan were both heirs-apparent. David and Jonathan both entered into combat for the first time after their opponent blasphemed the Lord. And David and Jonathan both walked selflessly toward one another.

Covenant Church Community

This covenant friendship of David and Jonathan can be specially had among God’s people in the church today. In the church community, believers share a common experience of once being dead in sin but then becoming alive in Christ. In the church community, believers who share common temptations find a level of peace they cannot achieve through other relationships. In the church community, believers share a common character as they live into the holiness and righteousness of Christ. In the church community, believers who are anointed for ministry develop bonds with others anointed for similar ministry in ways other relationships cannot replicate. In the church community, believers take special interest even in the lives of each other’s children. And in the church community, believers are uniquely physically affectionate toward one another, prayerfully hugging one another and greeting with holy kisses.

Church membership is about entering into a covenant relationship with the church community. In my church community, we enter into covenant with each other on the day we were baptized or when we became members. During these special services, it has been our practice for the congregation to rise and receive the new members but also enter into a covenant with them by saying these words—perhaps they sound familiar:

“Do you promise to receive in love, recognize their gifts, encourage, and support:

1. By teaching the Gospel of God’s love
2. By being an example of Christian faith and character, and
3. By giving the strong support of God’s family in fellowship, prayer, and service?

To which our congregation responds, “We do, God helping us.”

¹ Breshears, Gerry. “The Need for Open and Honest Male Friendship.” Men’s Roundup via YouTube, 9/15/2016.

Being part of a covenant community is not just about the adults either. Our covenant to one another extends even to each other’s children. The covenant loyalty of God’s people to one another is an intimate friendship the world is incapable of providing. This is the covenant friendship that prompted David to action toward his best friend’s son, Mephibosheth. David summoned the crippled, orphaned, fugitive Mephibosheth who was living his life of shame in the wilderness to come to Jerusalem. Mephibosheth believed he was as good as dead, yet instead of death, Mephibosheth received a transformed life in the presence of the king who adopted him as if Mephibosheth was one of his own sons. Mephibosheth received mercy and grace, not because of anything he had done, but because of the covenant made by another on his behalf.

Gospel Presentation and Conclusion

As much as we may like to be, we are not like David or Jonathan; we *are* Mephibosheth. I am Mephibosheth. I am crippled by my sin. I am full of shame. I am as good as dead. The weight of my sins is so great that my bones become weak (Ps. 38). The weight of my guilt is exceedingly great (Ezek. 9:9). I was dead in the sins in which I once walked carrying out the desires of my body and mind, and was by nature a child of wrath, like the rest of mankind (Eph. 2:1-3). I was in major debt because of my sin (Rom. 8:12). I am crippled by my sin. I am full of shame. I am as good as dead. Is this also true of you?

I am Mephibosheth. I am nevertheless called to appear before the king despite having no right to be in his presence. As such, I have no choice but to humbly bow before the king in hope of mercy. Who could stand before the Lord if he marked our iniquities (Ps. 130)? My sinfulness is so great that the Lord would be just to turn away never to look upon me again. Yet in God’s divine forbearance, I can confidently and boldly approach the throne of grace (Rom. 3:15; Heb. 4:16). The Lord blots out my transgressions for his own sake so that I may worship him and repent of my rebellion (Isa. 43:25). I am nevertheless called to appear before the King despite having no right to be in his presence. As such, I have no choice but to humbly bow before the King in hope of mercy. Is this also true of you?

I am Mephibosheth. I am shown mercy and grace not because of anything I did, but instead because of the covenant my Father made on my behalf before I was even born. Even when I was dead in my sins, God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love for me, made me alive together with Christ—for I have been saved by grace (Eph. 2:4-5)! God saved me and gave

me a holy calling, not because of my works but because of his purpose given to Christ before the ages began (2 Tim. 1:9). This covenant made on my behalf was that Christ would take my sins to the cross, carrying the crippling weight I could not carry myself. And on that cross, Jesus poured out his soul to cover my guilt so I can instead walk in his righteousness, appearing before the King who turned his face from Jesus instead of turning it from me. I am shown mercy and grace not because of anything I did, but instead because of the covenant my Father made on my behalf before I was even born. Is this also true of you?

I am Mephibosheth. I am adopted as a son of the King because of the covenant loyalty of my Davidic Messiah Jesus, and a seat is waiting for me to always eat at the table of my King. After his vicarious death, or in other words, after dying in my place, on the third day, this Jesus rose from the grave in victory over death. And when I first believed in his resurrection, and submitted my life to Jesus as my Lord, then the King gave salvation to me. God will raise me up to sit with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). Since I am led by the Holy Spirit, I have been adopted as a son of the King (Rom. 8:14-17). The Spirit himself bears witness that I am a child of God, and an heir with Christ. God’s love was given to me through the vicarious death and victorious resurrection of Christ so I would be called a child of God (1 John 3:1). I am adopted as a son of the King because of the covenant loyalty of Jesus, and a seat is waiting for me to always eat at his table. Is this also true of you?

I am Mephibosheth. Are you Mephibosheth? Are you crippled by your sin? Are you full of shame and guilt? Were you as good as dead? Are you nevertheless called to still appear before the King despite having no right to be in his presence? Do you humbly bow before the king in hope of mercy? Have you been shown mercy and grace not because of anything you did, but instead because of the covenant your Father made on your behalf before you were even born? Were you adopted as a son or daughter of the King because of the covenant loyalty of Jesus? And is a seat waiting for you to always eat at the table of your King? Are you Mephibosheth?

Jesus said it simply like this: *Greater love has no one than this: that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing, but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my father I have made known to you (John 15:13-15).* Are you a friend of Jesus? Jesus is the greater King David, but in our story he is also the greater sacrifice of

Jonathan, laying down his life for the sake of his friends; friends with whom he wants an intimate, covenant relationship.

Yet, we often struggle to live into our royal adoption. Just like how the passage repeatedly reminds us that Mephibosheth was crippled or lame, our enemy reminds us of our past shame and far too often do we listen to that voice. Interestingly, the nature of Mephibosheth’s disability was hidden as he sat at the King’s table to eat, no longer holding him back from the fullness of life in relation to his proximity to the anointed one. From that day on, Mephibosheth lived a transformed life. Sure the memory of his former life was still there; after all, he *was* still physically disabled, but for those who have been saved by his death and resurrection, despite the reality of the former life, Jesus has made a way to start living into our new life today. If anyone is in Christ, behold; a new creation! Shame has a way of lowering the bar. Shame may try to keep us in Lo-debar, but the call of the King summons us to Jerusalem where we will feast in the house of Zion forever and ever.

Let’s pray.