

A Meal With Mephibosheth

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[0 : 00] So we're looking, we started last night looking at a series across these three sermons that I'm here sharing with you at moments in the Bible that are about a feast that point to the Lord's Supper and are all about the Lord's Supper ultimately.

And last night if you were able to be here we looked at Melchizedek and the feast between Melchizedek and Abram. And today we come to the feast of another king, the feast of David with Mephibosheth here in this obscure passage in 2 Samuel 9.

This is one of the great stories from the Old Testament. And one of the famous commentators says about this story that this is David at his best. This is the moral climax of David's entire kingship.

And just like last night we saw that it was an encounter with Melchizedek with Abram after Abram had conquered his enemies. If you look, if you have a Bible you can see this, that in 2 Samuel 8 and 10 you've got passages on either side of this story where David is fighting.

He's at war and he's conquering his enemies. And then right in the midst of these war narratives all of a sudden there's 2 Samuel 9. And just like last night it's a text that almost doesn't fit.

[1 : 24] It comes right in the midst of war stories and it's this encounter between David and Mephibosheth. Now Christians have been coming to David's story in 1 and 2 Samuel for 2,000 years now and recognizing that David's story is very important for what we understand the whole of Christianity to be.

And the reason for that is because when you open the New Testament to Matthew chapter 1 the very first thing that the New Testament tells you about Jesus is not from Adam Ford, it's not from Abram Ford, it's not about Mary and Joseph.

The very first thing that the New Testament says about Jesus is that he is, quote, son of David. That's the first thing the New Testament wants you to know about the Messiah that came.

And that's more than just the fact that Jesus is in the bloodline of David. We know that he is. But it's even more than that. It stands for something more. It's that David and his kingship was actually a particular symbol, a type or a shadow of the true kingship that we should expect from the one that God was sending.

And one of the ways that you can know this is that Jesus at one point in Matthew, Matthew 19:22, asked the Pharisees a question. He says, what do you think Pharisees about the Christ that is to come?

[2 : 53] Of course, they thought that he wasn't the Christ that was to come, the Messiah. And this is what they said. They said, he must be the son of David. So when the Pharisees are asked, what do you think about this Messiah that you think you're still waiting for?

They say he's got to be the son of David. He's got to be a Messiah that comes in the lineage and likeness of David, that he's connected to David in some really meaningful way, that David had a messianic figure about him that we were to look for in the one that was to come Christ.

And so that means that just like last night we said that you can read the New Testament, Hebrews 7 and go back and read about Melchizedek and learn new things about Jesus so you can read the New Testament, go back to the David story and learn new things about Jesus.

And today in this passage we're going to see two lessons. And the first is the kindness of the king and then secondly the mercy of the king.

So first the kindness of the king. You can see in verse one that the very centerpiece of this story is that David in the midst of his war takes a break and he realizes he wants to give a gift.

[4 : 13] So he says is there anyone still left in the house of Saul that I can show what's the gift? Kindness. And he repeats that verse three, verse seven that he wants to show kindness.

And he tells us here in verse one that that's kindness for Jonathan's sake. So he qualifies that gift. He says I want to give kindness and I want to give it for the sake of Jonathan.

Now that means that there's a back story. This is not coming out of nowhere. And the back story is a familiar story and that's that Saul was the first king of Israel and Saul was ultimately cursed by God for his wickedness and God said to him, you know, I'm going to take you off the throne, but Saul had a son and his son was Jonathan, the one we just read about in verse one.

And that means that Jonathan, you know, if you were to ask who is the rightful heir of the British monarch, we all, everybody knew that Charles was going to be the heir because he's the next in the bloodline of the house of Windsor, right?

And when you ask in the house of Israel, who is the heir of the throne of Israel, the right answer is Jonathan. He's the son of the king.

[5 : 31] He's the next to be crowned after Saul. And yet God has come down and said, Saul, your kingdom is over and your son will not be king.

This little guy from the sons of Jesse, he's going to be the king, a man who had no prominence, total obscurity, David. But he's going to be the king.

He's going to replace your lineage. And so Saul goes on a murderous rampage. He tries to kill David multiple times. And we're told actually exactly why in 1 Samuel 17, why does Saul want to murder David?

And this is what he says, as long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you, Jonathan, nor your kingdom can be established.

And so the reason that Saul wants to kill David is because Saul wants his dynasty. He wants his son to be the king. He does not want to see anybody else on the throne.

[6 : 29] And then in 1 Samuel 18, Jonathan makes this moment. He makes a covenant with David. And what does he do? Do you remember this in 1 Samuel 18?

Jonathan says, David, I see what God's doing in your life and that God is going to make you king and I love you like God loves you.

And Jonathan takes off his royal robe. He takes off his royal belt and his sword and his bow and he lays it before David's feet.

And in that moment, you see what he's saying? He's saying, I am the rightful king. It's my blood that should sit on the throne of Israel. And yet I'm stripping myself of royalty, taking off my royal robe, taking off my royal sword and laying it at your feet, David, and saying to you that I covenant here and now, I promise that I will honor the fact that God has pronounced to you the king.

And in response to that kind of love, the love of a rightful heir giving away his throne, for the sake of God's love, God's pronouncement, David turns and he says, or sorry, Jonathan asked David, now promise me this, David, promise that as long as you live, you will not cut off your kindness to my house.

[7 : 56] That's the promise. That's the covenant. And David says, I promise, because you have laid down your royalty before me, I will not cut off my kindness to your house forever.

Now here in 2nd Samuel 9, ever since 1st Samuel 18, there's been not a word about that. And you come to 2nd Samuel 9 and all of a sudden David in the midst of war says, it's time.

It's time for me to show the kindness that I had promised Jonathan so long ago to his house, that I would not forget his house, that I would not forget his lineage, that I would show kindness.

And so here we are, David wanting to give this great gift that he had promised to Jonathan, kindness. And kindness, it shows up three times.

It's really, it's an okay word to use, but it's not, it's actually not heavy enough. It's not weighty enough. Because this is a very, very particular word in the Old Testament, a very special word, a word that is almost always in the Old Testament only used for the way that God loves sinners.

[9 : 07] And I want to give you the Hebrew because it's worth knowing. And it's the word, hessid, H-E-S-E-D, hessid. Because every time you see God come into the world and make a covenant with somebody, it is his pronouncement, he says, I've come to give you my hessid.

And hessid in the Old Testament means the love that only God can show to people that don't deserve love.

And there's a New Testament word that shows up in the Apostle Paul's letters quite often, and it's the little phrase, the mercy of God. Paul says the mercy of God, or in Hebrew, hessid, has shown up in the middle of history in Jesus Christ.

And kindness gets at it to a degree, but it's more than that. Hessid is the unique love of God for people who have rejected God.

And here it's usually translated across the Old Testament. You'll see it in the Psalms and in other places. The steadfast loyalty of the Lord sometimes. The hessid, the hessid of Yahweh.

[10 : 17] Or sometimes you'll see it translated as just simply the loving kindness of God. And the reason the translators translate it, even in the ESV that we read from, as loving kindness is because one word just can't do it.

You can't just say the kindness of God or the love of God. You've got to say the loving kindness of God because you need at least two words to describe this kind of love that God pours forth.

And it's significant here. Now you see what's happening? That means that when you come to 2 Samuel 9, what you realize, what we're being asked to realize is that the way that God loves people who don't deserve it can actually be imaged by us.

That David here is the one showing hessid. That it is possible for a human being like me, like you, to actually pour forth hessid love if you've seen it already.

If you've experienced it, you can actually give it to others. And so I just want to think with you about that for just a moment, especially as that kind of love relates to the modern world that we live in, the world of the 21st century, the world of 2022.

[11 : 32] Sociologists point out very regularly, and many pastors have picked up on this and made this point, you've probably heard it, that all of us have all sorts of types of relationships. We've got family relationships, friendships, church community relationships.

But today, more than ever in human history, one of the relationships that marks us off as human beings, modern human beings in particular, is the retail relationship, the market relationship.

And people have been going to market for all the centuries, of course. But never before in human history have people gone to retail like we do now. And so every one of us probably almost every day enters into a special retail relationship.

What is that relationship? Well, you know, you go to Tesco and you get the things that you want for your household, and you take them up to the cash register.

Immediately when you lay goods on the till, what are you doing? You're entering into a temporary contract. A temporary relationship. And you're saying to Tesco and to the person across from you, you know, I'm okay with what you're charging for these goods, and I'm willing to give you my goods, my money, so that I can get your goods, your food.

[12 : 49] Now that's a simple retail contract. We do this a thousand times every year, well more than a thousand times every year, right? And so whether it's on Amazon, from your phone, or your computer, or across from a person at Tesco, all of us are doing retail relationships all the time.

Now what the sociologists have been very careful to point out as they've mapped this over the 20th and 21st century is that because we enter into retail relationships now more than ever in human history, we are actually being tempted and allowing retail thinking to creep into the spaces where we're supposed to have relationships that are marked by hessed love.

You know, there's all sorts of relationships in our life that God says this is a covenant relationship, a hessed relationship, marriage, friendship, family life, church community, and above all else, our relationship with God Himself.

It's not a retail relationship, it's a covenant relationship. And those are totally different, totally opposite. One is needs-based, one says, I have a need and if you can give it to me at the right price then we can be in a relationship with one another.

But the other says the exact opposite. You know, one commentator says it like this, a covenant relationship is where love is a love I should say that is willing to deeply commit itself to another person by making a solemn and sacred promise all the way to the point of great loss.

[14 : 23] You know, a covenant relationship isn't need-based, it's a relationship where you say I'm willing to lose my freedom for your sake. I'm willing to give myself to you and to lose my time, my talents and gifts, my money, my treasure for your sake.

That's covenant relationship, it's the total opposite. Another commentator calls hessed relationships, covenant, the love of deep commitment, a love that does not leave when needs aren't met but loses and sacrifices for the sake of the other.

Now one pastor puts it like this, he says, because we are so inundated all the time with retail that we live our lives in retail relationships in 2022 that it's very easy even for in the church to allow the retail mentality to creep in to the covenant mentality.

And we see that in the wider culture all around us that people treat covenant relationships more like their retail relationships. And even the church we're tempted in these ways.

I tell people all the time, we lived in Edinburgh for five years and then my family and I, we moved back to America and I passed her to church for four years and then we've moved back to Edinburgh for the last ten months.

[15 : 44] And people sometimes will ask, well why did you come back and there's a hundred reasons, and all good reasons. We couldn't stay away from Scotland. But one of the reasons is because we got invited back to come be a pastor at St. Columbus in Edinburgh.

And St. Columbus is a hessed community. It's a place that people love each other deeply and commit and sacrifice and just from my time talking to Thomas he talks about how Carlyway is a hessed community.

It's a place where people love one another and they commit to one another. And that's because of the experience that we've had of the love of God in the covenant. And yet at the same time because we're sinners, no matter how good our love is for one another today, there's always the temptation, always, that we let a different standard creep in.

And we've got to be awake and aware always by coming back to the covenant God to see the standard by which we relate to other people around us. And you know, here's a little test and we'll move on.

But here's a little test. How do you know if you have covenant relationships? Well think about friendship for just a moment. You know that you have a covenant friendship when your friend is able to speak the truth to you about your struggles.

[17 : 13] You know when your friend can come to you and say, I think that this is an area where I see maybe you're drifting, you're walking away from the good path that there's not righteousness here that I love you and I love you and I want you to grow.

You know covenant relationship and friendship is when a person is willing to speak the truth to you and love precisely because they love you, because they want what's best for you, because they want you to grow.

And that means that a true covenant friendship is one where there is neither flattery nor harshness. You know flattery is when you're all love with no truth and harshness is when you're all truth without love.

But the right Paul, remember the apostle Paul what he said, that the paradigm for relationship speak the truth in love and that's the mark of a covenant relationship.

Now it is very possible for the people of God to love like this because we've seen it and we've experienced it but it's always a temptation and we could come to close this point and move on to our final point and ask how can David love like this?

[18 : 27] David wants to give that kind of love, steadfast loyalty, the hesed of God. Verse 3 says he wants to give the hesed of God to somebody else.

How can he love like that? And it's because he's experienced it. And another way to think about it is this. Where do we see this love first show up in the Bible?

One of the places that's really significant where you see the covenant love of God first show up is in Genesis 15, very strange passage. In Genesis 15 God comes to Abram and says I'm making a covenant with you and I'm going to love you no matter what and I'm going to from you make a great nation all the way to the point of the church.

And Abram says well show me, show me, prove it God. Oh boy. He says to God prove it and then God turns and he says okay take a heifer, a pigeon and a turtle dove and cut them in half.

And so Abram takes these animals and he cuts them literally in half and he sets them in two lines to make an aisle, a row. And God says when the time comes we shall pass between these dead animal carcasses.

[19 : 50] Now we call that in Old Testament studies the oath of malifaction. What does that mean? It means that it's when you say you make a promise, it's a ceremony just like when you put a ring on the finger at the wedding where you say right now I'm making a public display of covenantal promise.

That if I break the conditions of the covenant relationship may I become like these animals. It's an oath of malifaction against my own self that if I was to break the covenant may I be cut in half.

And when the time comes for Abram to pass between the pieces to say before God Lord if I ever break the covenant relationship against you may I be cut into two pieces like these animals.

God puts Abram to sleep and he says you go sit over there and God passes between the pieces back and forth.

And that's covenant love because in that moment what God is saying is Abram I know that you cannot keep the covenant.

[21 : 05] And so before you go and curse yourself I will curse myself for you. You see what he's doing? The reason that God went back and forth is because he's saying when you break the covenant Abram may I receive the oath of malifaction.

May I receive what you are supposed to receive. I will stand in your place. And that's the covenant love of God.

It's called grace and mercy. The mercy of God. And now David here you know David had heard God say this to him in 2nd Samuel 7 when God came down and made a covenant with David and said I'm going to pour my hesed upon your household forever.

He had experienced it but look even more even before that how is David able to do this to love like this. Well listen remember the covenant that he's that David's particularly appealing to here the covenant with Jonathan.

What did Jonathan do? You know Jonathan was the rightful heir to the throne and Jonathan came to David and stripped himself of royalty and said I deserve Jonathan said you know I deserve to be on the throne but I will come down and lay before you my royalty even to the point that I'm willing for my own father to kill me because he knows his dad will come after him for this.

[22 : 38] And he says David I'm willing to love you all the way to the point of death all the way to the point of stripping myself of my royalty. Now look have you heard that before?

There's another king who said that he did not consider a quality in the throne room of heaven with God the father something to be held on to but he made himself nothing by stripping himself of his royalty and becoming in the form of a servant going and saying look for you for you I will go all the way to death I will go all the way to death to give you life.

And you see the reason that David is able to do this and to love like this is because he had experienced a gospel in miniature form one that would go to death for him and that means that all the way back here in the Old Testament the good news the good news is being preached that there is one to come that will strip himself of his royalty and go all the way to the point of death to love you in the way that God keeps loving us that so that you might have life he takes death he takes the curse and that's the message of the gospel and it's right here even in the Old Testament.

Now secondly and finally and briefly where do we get the power to love like this and secondly we see it in the mercy of the king.

We've covered so far verse one of the passage okay but don't worry we will go through from verse two to thirteen very quickly. In verse two we find out who David wants to show kindness to and it's a man by the name of Mephibosheth.

[24 : 28] Now we said last night that if you want to know about a person you know if you want to get a job today you need to have a good CV marketable skills and here we read about Mephibosheth's CV just like we looked at Melchizedek's CV last night who is Mephibosheth?

Mephibosheth's name is Ihbosheth in Hebrew Mephibosheth which means very literally shame or it's translated in full the one who comes from the mouth of shame that's his name.

His bloodline he is the grandson of Saul the disgraced king the cursed king he's a wicked bloodline in the eyes of the people.

Where does he come from verse four says that he comes from low debar and low debar in Hebrew means nowhere very literally.

His name is shame he's of the cursed lineage of the forgotten king and he lives in nowhere nowhere of ill if you will. And then finally we learn that he's disabled and very significantly two times in the passage at the very beginning and the very last thing we're told in verse 13 is that he is disabled he's lame in both of his feet and that's very important the text is book ending that for you so that you won't forget it because to be disabled in the ancient Near East is a death sentence there's no care it's often just to be left to be left to die quite frequently in this ancient world and how did he become disabled where we know second Samuel four when David and when Saul and Jonathan died and David's men came after the family of Saul the nurse of Mephibosheth when he was five years old she picked Mephibosheth up ran away from David's men fell on his legs crushed his legs and they never healed and so the very reason that he is disabled is because David David had sent his men and that leads us to the final aspect of who this man is when you can see in verse six that when he shows up to the king Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan the son of Saul he bows down on his face before David David has to tell him in just a moment to get up and the reason for that is because he knows what's happening here what's happening here what does Mephibosheth think is happening what Mephibosheth thinks is that he's coming to get what the rest of

[27 : 15] Saul's family got and this is the standard practice in the ancient world that when there's a regime change a dynasty change there's only one thing that the new king does to the old family let me tell you about it this is from one great Old Testament scholar when a regime came to power the name of the game is purge you don't go to the ancient Near East to even find this out you can stay within the pages of the Bible and see Basha and first Kings Zemri and first Kings 16 or Jehu and second Kings 10 or even David and find out what happens to the remnants of the previous family there's always the same then the new king always needed to solidify his position it was conventional political policy solidification by liquidation everybody knew it everybody believed that everybody practiced it Mephibosheth has lasted this long and he can't believe it he knows that David has to kill him because he is quote an enemy of the state he's from the disgraced bloodline he has to die and so he comes he puts his head down on the ground he gives David his neck you see now let's review his name is from out of the mouth of shame he's from the disgraced bloodline of the wicked king he lives in Nowhereville he's disabled in both of his feet and he is an enemy of the state and for all those reasons in the eyes of the ancient world he deserves death at the hands of the king and David David puts his hand on Mephibosheth's shoulder and says fear not stand up today you are no longer my enemy today you are now my son that's what he says and you see kingship if there was that if we were to have messianic kingship kingship at its best would be a would be one where covenant love so takes over that the king even comes and stoopes down to his enemies and says you were once my enemy but now you're my son you know you deserve to die but the king himself has come and called you home to his palace and said today today you will eat at my table no longer you my enemy today you are my son today are you you are my daughter now listen David this is why the commentators say that this is the moral climax of David's kingship here David is being truly a great king but oh boy you know this is David at his best but this is not the best David this is not the best David and there is a better king than this who comes in the shadow and lineage of this king and this is what it says about him it says that while we were enemies of

God while we were helpless while this was our CV the CV of Mephidosheth enemies of the state while we were enemies that God came for us by killing his own son there is there David is great here but there is a better king and that better king came to comes to you today and says fear not stand up you no longer have to be an enemy of the state that the has said love of God has poured forth in the covenant love of Jesus Christ this is the good news of the Old Testament that screams Ford of the great tapestry of the gospel that comes all the way to climax in the moment that Jesus turns in John 15 and says you were my enemy but today disciples I say you are friends your brothers your sisters you've been changed forever and this is the good news of the gospel and look you see what happens when the king says to you I want to give you my has said love the very next thing he does is say now get up and come and sit at my table and the end of the passage tells us that for the remainder of Mephidosheth's days he sat at the king's table like a son and ate his bread and drank his wine and that that's the Lord supper you know it's the king's feast it's when the king says to you you were once an enemy and now you're an adopted son and daughter and it's when the king says to you come and eat at my table for all of your days and it's when you say why me and there's no answer the only answer is because he wants it to be that way because he came for you because he came and gave you the grace that you didn't deserve it's covenant love it's covenant love and it gets it's only there in experiencing it today that you have the power to go and love like that in the midst of your friendships your family the church God himself it's only if you've experienced that covenant love and it's by the radical mercy of the love of the true king you see what this tells us what this points us to is to say this you know when you when you come to the Lord's supper it is not the table of death goodness no Jesus Christ is not dead it's the table that because he has died and he rose from the dead and he lives it's the table and power of resurrection life it's the feast it's not about it's that he died but he did not stay dead he resurrected from the dead the king has so come for you that like Jonathan he stripped himself of his royalty and went all the way to the point of death but unlike Jonathan he did not stay dead and so today you can have a feast that points forward to a life that is to come a resurrection life and that means that this is a resurrection feast and Jesus Christ invites you and his invitation is to say this do you say why me why me that's just simply taking hold of what he's offered in faith and that's the only condition that's the only condition now I'll close with this I'll close with this and we'll have the Lord's supper together one of my old professors at seminary teaching on this passage when we were working through the Old Testament together he pointed this out he asked the question about 2nd Samuel 9 he said who is it that ate at the table of David you know we see at the end that from then on Mephibosheth quote always ate at the table of the king now who is it that would come to eat at this table and we know who we know who ate at David's royal table am none ate at David's royal table he was David's true eldest enlisted among the mighty men so

he's a mighty warrior secondly Tamar who was said to be the most beautiful woman in all of Israel thirdly Absalom remember Absalom it said before he rebelled that there was not a blemish from the crown of his head to the bottom of his feet and then Joab the captain of David's army he was the Hercules in figure of ancient Israel the mightiest man of all and then Solomon the wisest man who would ever live prior to Christ and the next king and just imagine it every single day every single day Mephibosheth would be carried to the table and he would be sat down at the table with the six people in all of Israel that are the prettiest and most powerful and strongest and you know what they would say about him they would say here comes Mephibosheth he was once the enemy of the king but today he is the son he's just like me he's the son of the king he's adopted and you see that because of what Jesus has done you can have your status changed you can go from enemy to to the son and the daughter the prince and the princess that has the right right to sit at the table of God and it's about all that Jesus did and it's wide open you receive it by nothing more than faith let's take a moment now and pray and we'll come to rest under the hand of the king father we ask now that you would give us the eyes of faith that we would know that the table is your pronouncement to us that the cross and the resurrection have done it all and that we would see it as the forward-looking promise that one day we will feast in the house of Zion with the true king so make us and help us to see ourselves as Mephibosheth sons and daughters adopted and we pray this for this heart in Christ's name.

Amen.