

# An Unlikely Recipient of the King's Kindness

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 05 August 2018

Preacher: Jeremy Tam

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Amen. That's an amazing story that we've heard, and I'm really looking forward to just diving into the heart and the redemption and the struggle that we see in this story. But before we get into the text and in the passage, my name is Jeremy, and it's a pleasure to be with you if you don't know me. And I want to just kind of give you a little recap, a little summary of where we've been going with this series called Christ in the Old Testament. And over the last few weeks, we've basically been looking at how we see the person of Jesus Christ, not just in the New Testament, but actually shadows of him, foreshadowings of him in the Old Testament, and how the entire Bible is actually one grand, beautiful narrative and story that God is telling, and it's consistent.

And it's almost as if we can see Christ in the pages of the Old Testament. And so far, we've seen in the first week in Genesis the story of Abraham and Sodom, and how our only hope is found in the righteousness of another, and ultimately in Christ. We've also seen in the story of Jacob wrestling with God, and we saw how God is willing to be defeated in order to bring blessing to us, his people, just like how Christ was willing to die and be defeated on that cross to be a blessing to us.

We also saw in the story of Gideon in Judges, how we need to recognize our weakness, our sin, in order to see Christ's power and his grace. We've seen through the story of Naaman last week that the only right way to approach God is actually to approach him with nothing, empty-handed, because we cannot earn the grace that Christ offers us freely. And so this morning, we're going to look at the story of Mephibosheth. And it shows us so clearly that God's kindness comes to even the most unlikely of people. So first, we'll look at this tragic figure of Mephibosheth. We'll look at how he is a suffering enemy of God. Second, we'll look at how God's kindness comes to him, the true nature and meaning of biblical kindness. Thirdly, we'll look at the actual life-changing results that this kind of kindness brings out of humans like us. And finally, we'll think about the question, we'll explore, like, what does this all have to do with us today in the 21st century? So you ready?

Before we start, let me just pray for us, okay? Lord, we just confess that we're so small and you are God, but thank you that you would humble yourself to reveal yourself to us in words through your scripture, God. And I just pray that this morning, this sermon would be worshiped to you, God, that you, through your spirit, would just speak to all of us in this room, that you would speak to me, you would speak to every person sitting in these seats before me, that we would come to know more deeply your character, God, who you are, what you've done for us, what you desire for us. So God, we open our hearts to you, Lord.

Soften where we are hardened. Remove the obstacles that have just blocked our ears so that we may receive what you have for us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. So the tragedy of Mephibosheth, this suffering enemy of the king. And to really understand this character and to really be able to identify with him, we actually need to know a little bit more of the context of the passages we read. There's a little sliver of that in chapter 4, verse 4 that was read to us from 2 Samuel.

But actually, there's more backstory that we need to know to really grasp that. So let me just catch us up on that. So Mephibosheth's grandfather was actually Saul. Those of you who may know this story, but bear with me, Saul was actually the first king of Israel. And unfortunately, Saul disobeyed and he rejected God. And so God rejected him as king. And one of Saul's sons was Jonathan. And Jonathan became the father of Mephibosheth. So you're tracking with me? So Saul, and then Jonathan, and then Mephibosheth.

[ 5 : 1 8 ] And in this time, in this time period in Samuel, this was also a period of war and conflict between Israel and her neighbors. So there was a group of people, the Philistines, who were basically a thorn in Israel's side. There was all of these wars and skirmishes that are ongoing conflicts between them.

And who's heard of the story of David and Goliath? All right, a few of you. Basically, that famous story of David slinging down that giant Goliath, that is from this period as well, in this battle between Israel and the Philistines. And so this is the world that Mephibosheth was born into. He was royalty, a grandson to the king. And he certainly lived in a state of privilege. But he was also born into a world of turmoil, a world of war. His grandfather had turned away from God, and there was internal strife and brokenness there. His people were in conflict, were at war. And this is where we picked up the story in 2 Samuel 4. And let me just read that for us again. It said, Jonathan, the son of Saul, had a son who was crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel. And his nurse took him up and fled. And as she fled in her haste, he fell and became crippled in his feet. He became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth. And so as a five-year-old, the news that they received, that Mephibosheth received, was that his granddad and his dad had died in battle against the Philistines. Now, if that wasn't enough to take in, instantly he's wrapped up and he has to be taken away. Because who knows what would happen with the king and the princes now dead. You know, it's understandable that there would be fear for all of the royal family at this time. So understandably, the nurse takes him and runs away. But tragedy strikes again.

The child falls and breaks both of his feet. And in one fell swoop, at the age of five, Mephibosheth goes from being the son of royalty, the place of wealth, full of potential and promise to an orphan, a fugitive, broken, disabled. Mephibosheth, I think he becomes a poster child for people who have just tragedy thrust upon their lives. And physical disability, I think we all know itself is hard enough to navigate in today's advanced age, in today's more accepting age. But in biblical times, the implications of being lame were serious indeed.

You became utterly dependent on others. You lose your way of livelihood. There was even this sense that perhaps you were cursed because you've lost your physical, your full functioning ability. You read in the Bible that blindness and lameness are often just lumped together. You know, this group of outcasts, these people who were separated, segregated from society.

[ 8 : 56 ] One scholar even thinks in commenting on this passage that after the death of Mephibosheth's uncles, you know, there was no mention at all of him perhaps succeeding the throne. And he thinks one reason for that was probably because he was disabled. He was seen as incapacitated, incapable of serving in that role. Mephibosheth went from everything to nothing.

And so we see in this story, this tale of this young man, an example of real suffering. But I think he also exemplifies what it looks like to be an enemy, an enemy of the king.

Because after King Saul rejected God, and God rejected King Saul, God chose another man, David, right? He chose David to replace Saul as the next rightful king. And what that meant is, in essence, Saul's offspring would not continue on the throne. The house of Saul would now be replaced by the house of David. But after Saul's death, you know, the followers that were loyal to Saul, they actually tried to keep Saul's line going. And there was basically this internal struggle within Israel about who would be the rightful king. You know, it's the stuff that all these movies are made of, right? Lord of the Rings or Game of Thrones, if you've read it. Maybe not watched it. Or watched it censored, I don't know. But anyway, it's that story. We all see that the drama, you know, it's not nothing new with that. That happened from ancient times. And this battle was happening. But long story short, obviously, we know that David's house won out because he was chosen by God and he was rightfully anointed as king of Israel. But what does that mean now when that happens? It means now that all the people, the surviving members of the old house, are de facto enemies of the new house. And it was the custom in those times, in that era, that when a regime change happened, that the new regime would basically eliminate all the heirs of the old house. All the people who could have succeeded would be killed. And the reason was simple, right? It would prevent any sort of chance of insurrection, of insubordination, of another conflict coming out.

So Mephibosheth should actually have been killed and he was in mortal danger because of his status. And not only that, it's not even just the regime change, but Mephibosheth was an enemy because his grandfather and Saul was actually enemies, personal enemies with David. Saul actually tried to kill David when they were both alive. And he even pursued David until David had to flee Israel. So you can imagine maybe if you were Mephibosheth, you're like, oh man, there is serious beef between my ancestors, my grandfather and Saul. You know, Saul, David has every reason to chase me down, to hunt me down, to kill me because of what my grandfather did to him.

So now Mephibosheth, he's an orphan, he's a disabled person, he's a fugitive, but he's also an enemy of his own state, deserving of death. Some life this turned out for him, isn't it? Some life this turned out to be.

[12:54] And this is the back story of Mephibosheth. It's this backdrop that makes 2 Samuel chapter 9 so jaw-dropping. When you see how David comes into this life, into the life of this broken, distraught, estranged young man, this tragic character. And this chapter 9 is where we look at God's kindness to this very unlikely recipient of it. So let me read again for us in verse 1 of chapter 9.

This is what it says. David said, is there still anyone left, anyone left in the house of Saul that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?

And church, this is the key verse this morning for us to see how Mephibosheth's life really begins to turn around. In this verse, we first see that King David's character, we see the true nature of this man of God in this one sentence. You know, the Bible describes David as a man after God's own heart.

You know, he's known as perhaps the greatest king of Israel in the Old Testament. And this is where it shines, it shows. He has kindness far beyond our expectations. So Jonathan, remember Mephibosheth's father, when Jonathan was still alive before he died in that war with the Philistines, against odds, he actually became best friends, best buddies with David. They were inseparable. And they were so close that they even made a covenant, a sacred promise that God's love would always be between them. It would always be between their children, their offspring.

[14:54] And so in this case, it would be understandable for David to remember and to want to seek out Jonathan's children to help him, to help them. But notice what David says here. He says, is there anyone in the house of Saul, anyone, anyone in this family that was deposed by me?

David's mercy, his compassion extends beyond what was expected. Not only did he refrain himself from annihilating Saul's house, but he actually wanted to show kindness to everyone in it for Jonathan's sake.

So that's the incredible kindness of David. Secondly, as we dig deeper into this sentence, we actually see the true nature of biblical kindness. And you see this word kindness that David used. It's actually really important because it's repeated two more times in this chapter, in verse 3 and verse 7. And as you hear over and over again, when you see this repetition, chances are that it's important.

So what do you hear, what do you think when you hear that someone is kind or shows kindness? What does that kind of conjure in my mind? I don't know about every one of you, but to be honest, when I hear that someone's kind, I usually just kind of think more on the lines of, okay, he's, he's, he's, this guy's gentle and he's kind of nice, maybe a little soft.

[16:31] That's just kind of my presuppositions. Like the word kindness doesn't strike like awe into my life. And so this is one of those times that I think we really actually need to dig deep into this one Hebrew word.

I don't want to just make it academic, but this is one of those words I think we need to focus on because this word in Hebrew just really isn't a direct translation for us in English, in my opinion. And the word kindness actually doesn't do justice to the meaning of this word. And so I just want to teach us this word. It's called, in Hebrew, it's called hesed.

Hesed. Hesed. Sure, you can repeat with me. Hesed. It's all right. Some of you have tried again. Let's try it. Hesed. Yes. H-E-S-E-D is a translation. And just remember that because I want us to hold on to that this morning.

And this word is amazing because it combines all these ideas of goodness, kindness, steadfastness, you know, that steadiness of a friend that has always been with you, faithfulness, love, loyalty.

[17:49] And that's just to name a few. You know, you could go on further and further in the dictionary. And that's why some of the older translations you might read in the Bible actually translate this as loving kindness, just to kind of show you there's a complexity to that.

But even that, in my opinion, doesn't do it justice. You see how just rich and deep this word is? That when someone hears, I think in Hebrew, hesed, he doesn't just hear, oh, he's kind.

He's nice. All those ideas come together in this amazing word. And do you see then why David chooses this word when he talks about acting on behalf of the covenant, the promise he had with

Jonathan?

David is remembering that covenant between him and Jonathan. And it's out of his goodness and steadfast love that he faithfully and loyally acts on the promises that were made.

In verse 3, David repeats this question, but he's even more explicit. He says, You see, David is humbly recognizing that it's not him who's conjuring up this kindness, but it's actually the kindness of God, the hesed of God.

[ 19 : 26 ] And so, friends, this is the nature of biblical kindness. It's that in the depths of Mephibosheth's shame and suffering, as he lives as this enemy to the king, David faithfully remembers him, not with his own kindness, but with the kindness of God.

And so he finds him, and he brings him before his throne. And can you just imagine for a minute what it might have been like for Mephibosheth to have been brought in, this lame, crippled, disabled man brought in before King David, before his enemy, so to speak, before the enemy of his grandfather.

In verse 9, this kind of shows, gives you an idea of a window into his heart. He says, What is your servant that you should show regard for a dead dog such as I?

And to call someone a dog in ancient Israel was an insult, was derogatory to the highest degree, not to mention a dead dog.

So we can maybe imagine how Mephibosheth's identity had been changed and warped by being separated from society, that he would now call himself a dead dog, prostrate before the king of Israel.

[ 21 : 04 ] And maybe you can imagine what maybe is going through his mind at this moment. But it's at this time that he hears King David say these words.

Do not fear, do not fear, Mephibosheth, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father, Jonathan.

Mephibosheth was broken. He was estranged, but he was never forgotten. So now that we know this biblical meaning of hesed, let's turn to the third point, where we see that how these words of David were life-changing to Mephibosheth.

This true kindness actually impacted him in a way that he could not have expected. Because here's the thing, David could have easily said, okay, I remember my covenant with your father, Jonathan. I remember that. So I'm not going to kill you. Don't worry about it. You'll be fine. You'll be protected. Go in peace. Goodbye. And you know what?

[ 22 : 25 ] That wouldn't have been a bad thing, right? He would no longer be an enemy of the state, a promise to preserve Mephibosheth, to not let him actually be killed, by all means would have been a decent and humane and a tangibly good thing, right?

But if you've heard the story of Mephibosheth as we have, as you've imagined how he must have been feeling through these years, from age five to this moment in time, do you think that it was really just the preservation of his life that was what he needed?

Was that really what Mephibosheth needed in his heart of hearts? You know, by calling himself a dead dog, I wonder how much he really even cared about his existence at that point.

It's not just living and breathing and eating and pooping that makes you human, right? There's so much more. And what exactly is Mephibosheth thinking about his existence?

Because I don't think death and life was the ultimate issue for him because he had lost everything, everything that had gave him meaning and purpose.

[ 23 : 40 ] He lost his home. Now he was living under the care of a stranger in Lodbar. He had lost his wealth and his means of living. He lost his father, his grandfather, his family.

He lost his status going from royal household to enemy of the king. And as we've understood in losing his mobility, it wasn't ultimately his mobility that he lost, but his dignity, his honor.

So in verse 7, when David proclaims those words, I will restore to you all the land of Saul, your father, and you shall eat at my table always.

In those two statements, everything changes. The kindness of God categorically reverses everything that Mephibosheth has lost.

How does that happen? In verse 9, David restates that everything that belonged to Saul's house is given to Mephibosheth.

[ 24 : 57 ] In verse 10, David provides servants to Mephibosheth to work the land, to steward his property. His wealth is now restored.

He has his own home. He has his own means of living. More importantly, David also says that, you will now eat at my table always.

And we know also that this phrase is packed with importance because he says this three more times. The author writes this three more times in this chapter. You will eat at my table always. Because to eat at someone's table is not just like grabbing McDonald's and sitting at that counter. In biblical times, eating with a person was identifying with them, was fellowship with them. And that's why in verse 10, David is so explicit. Yes, Mephibosheth, you will have servants to work your land. You will have your own food.

[ 26 : 04 ] You will be provided for. You could eat your own food all the time, every day, all the time, for as long as you want. But you actually shall always eat at my table, in my family.

You have your own food that you can eat, but this is about relationship. This is about family. And that's why in verse 11, the writer says, Mephibosheth ate at David's table like one of the king's sons. Like one of the king's sons. And next, the author also mentions that Mephibosheth has a young son, Micah.

And later, we know, if you read on in the Bible, you know that Micah has a number of other offspring in a genealogy. And so what does this tell us? It tells us that Mephibosheth goes from a dead dog, a suffering enemy of the king.

And now, because of David's kindness, because of the kindness of God, he has become the son of the king. And he brings forth life.

[ 27 : 20 ] Isn't that amazing? Isn't that amazing? And finally, in this passage, we see that as Mephibosheth is welcomed into King David's household, we read again in verse 13, so Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, for he ate always at the king's table.

Now, he was lame in both his feet. The end. Now, that conclusion can seem a little jarring at first, right? It doesn't seem like the stuff that fairy tales are made of.

Roll credits. A picture of his lame feet. It's an odd way, maybe, it seems to conclude the story. And it's really clear, I think the author is making it clear, that the lameness in Mephibosheth was not miraculously healed, even though presumably that was possible.

And I think the real reason behind this is that the miracle of Mephibosheth is that this broken and disabled man has his dignity, his honor restored to him, despite his lameness, despite being disabled.

It's not a superficial solution that promotes self-sufficiency, but it's something that goes to the core of his need, the part of his soul that he lost when he lost everything.

[ 28 : 57 ] His honor is bestowed from outside, from the king who welcomes him as a son. It doesn't matter what his physical state he's in, he is the king's son who eats at the king's table.

There is honor and dignity beyond anything that the world could provide him. This is God's life-changing kindness.

So friends, what is all of that happening a couple thousand years ago, three thousand years ago? What does that have to do with us this morning, whether we're Christians or non-Christians sitting here? And I think it's that when we hear the story of Mephibosheth's suffering, I think a lot of those themes resonate with us.

You know, the idea of being born into a world of turmoil and strife. You only need to turn on the news and read a few pages or listen for a few minutes before you start feeling sick in your stomach about all that's happening.

[ 30 : 16 ] You just really need to open your eyes to the stories that you hear, the struggles that you hear. You just need to be honest and open your heart just like we heard from Brian earlier about what's really going on in our own hearts.

Some of us wrestle with the fact that our hopes and dreams, perhaps like Mephibosheth, those dreams were just ripped out from beneath us. Ruined because of things outside of our control. So much potential and purpose lost and squandered. Maybe a dream job that just slipped through your fingertips.

A dream career that never materialized. Lost hope to build a family or a home. You know, some of us here have suffered, like Mephibosheth, the tragic loss of family members.

Some of us are really dealing with major family issues in our lives right now. All of us experience the pain of dysfunction in our families.

[ 31 : 34 ] You know, maybe it's not to the same extent that Mephibosheth and Saul went through. But we all deal with our environment, generational sin, the worst combination of nature and nurture. You know, when you see that the addictions and the genes and the bad habits and the brokenness and the consequences of poor decisions made by your forefathers shaping your life today. And it's not only just that kind of suffering, but we all suffer from being an enemy to the king. Not a human king like King David.

Not a human government, but the king who created the universe. Who created this world. Who created you and I. A God who lovingly created us so that we could lovingly worship him. But every day we struggle with being enemies of this king because we choose to ignore him. We choose to serve ourselves instead. And like Mephibosheth's tragic story, I think the story of humanity is actually incredibly tragic.

[ 32 : 51 ] Because God created us. The Bible tells us God created us to take care of this world on his behalf. to take care of it because we love him and we love what he's created.

But in our endless pursuit to be better, stronger, faster, better than the next person, prettier, smarter, we've basically crushed each other, we've crushed ourselves, and we're destroying each other in creation.

You know, everything I think that's wrong with the world today from self-loathing to world wars is because of our rejection of God. And so that's what we mean when we say sin.

The sin makes us like a bunch of dead dogs. Perhaps living and breathing, but spiritually dead, separated from God.

and that's what we deserve, just like Mephibosheth. And just like in that story, it's under this, behind this backdrop of sin and suffering that God intervenes.

[ 34 : 03 ] Whatever you're suffering through in your seats today, in your life today, I think this story of Mephibosheth is God's message to you and to me.

That he remembers you. He remembers you in your pain. He remembers you in your sin and your suffering.

He doesn't want you to be his enemy. He wants to show you his kindness, his chesed. You know, in the story that we just heard, David was the conduit of God's kindness.

But as we know, a thousand years after him, a man called Jesus of Nazareth was born into the same world. Not only that, he was actually born from David's line.

He was part of the house of David. And in every way, he was filled with the kindness of David. But unlike David, Jesus was actually perfect.

[ 35 : 07 ] He was God in human form. David was still broken. He still made mistakes. But Jesus walked this earth sinless, welcoming those who suffered, sharing tables with self-professed sinners.

He healed the lame. He forgave sins. And he gave dignity and honor to those who had none. You know, David made a covenant with Jonathan, which was wonderful.

But Jesus, he made a covenant with all humanity. Remember what he said on the night before his crucifixion. Remember he took a cup of wine and gave it to his disciples.

He said, drink it, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. David's covenant, it cost him everything that he offered to Mephibosheth, which was significant, but nothing compared to Jesus' covenant with us because that cost him his own life on the cross.

His own life on that cross wasn't just material. It was his own separation from God. We deserved that death.

[ 36 : 37 ] We deserved that separation, but he went through it in our place. And through this covenant, this new covenant that Jesus brought in, God now welcomes us. He can welcome us into his royal household.

We, as suffering enemies, welcomed into the king's table. And church, when you read the Bible, you'll notice that one of the most prominent symbols of eternal life, of heavenly blessing, is this idea of a great banquet or a wedding feast.

And just like David, Jesus says to us, come, come to my table, come to this banquet, come into eternal blessing and life.

And so our choice this morning is how to respond to that invitation. Now, I guess Mephibosheth could have said no to David.

He could have left disabled thinking he could muster up the wherewithal to get through the rest of his life. He could have pretended that he wasn't the enemy of the king.

[ 37 : 49 ] But I think the story tells us that he knew exactly what his predicament was. And so he joyfully accepted the king's kindness.

And likewise, every one of us in this room right now, whether we're non-Christians or we've been Christians for decades, every one of us has a choice whether or not to accept or to continue accepting the kindness of God.

When you've been forgiven, when you've accepted that kindness, when you've been welcomed to the table, when you've been adopted by the king of the universe, when you know that you have an eternal home that's completely free from death and pain and suffering, you begin to see this life a little differently.

That's what happened to Mephibosheth. If you read on in Samuel tonight, you'll see that much later in the story of Mephibosheth, he's actually falsely accused of plotting against David.

And he's now in danger of losing all his property once again. And instead of complaining and freaking out and cursing God, he basically tells David as David returns from war, he says, I'm just grateful to be alive and to be in your presence.

[ 39 : 21 ] Do whatever you want with my property. The king's kindness has now overflowed from Mephibosheth's heart.

Church, you see that a person who understands suffering, who understands that they are an enemy of the king will gladly receive his kindness.

So how are you suffering today? What's the sin and brokenness that you're struggling with? You, you who's suffering from sickness and disability, God remembers you this morning and he says, come, come to my table, come and eat.

You who's wrestling with addiction and lust or whatever it is, he's saying, God's saying he remembers you. Come, come to my table.

You who's torn within a broken family, God remembers you and he says, come, come to my table.

You who's in the despair of loneliness and fear and solitude, God says, come, come into my family, come to my table.

[ 40 : 56 ] You who's drowning under the expectations of this world, God says, come, my burden is light, come to my table.

You who's lost without purpose in life, God says, come, come to my table, I remember you, I have a purpose for you.

All of us sinners without eternal hope, God says, come, come to my table because I remember you. And tomorrow, when things get crazy this week, just remember that the cross of Christ is rock-solid proof that God remembers you.

You know, his kindness, his chesed, that's what's going to bring you home. Let's pray together together.