

"MEPHIBOSHETH"

II Samuel 9

The Old Testament contains some of the most beautiful pictures of the saving grace of God that we find anywhere. In II Samuel 9 there is a lovely story which clearly and beautifully portrays that grace.

When David slew the giant Goliath, the women ascribed greater praise to him than they did to Saul, whereupon Saul became exceedingly jealous of David and attempted to slay him. Saul's hatred of David never changed Jonathan's attitude toward his beloved friend. Jonathan warned David of his father's intention to slay him and thus delivered him from the snares that Saul set for him. Even when Saul was seeking the life of David, Jonathan remained his true friend and risked his life repeatedly for him, even expressing the hope that David should occupy the throne instead of his father or himself.

David did not fail to requite Jonathan's love. Saul and Jonathan had both died in battle. The Philistines who had slain them had been defeated by David. As king over the united Israel, David had reached the pinnacle of success and was in the acme of his glory. He immediately turned his attention to the strengthening of his kingdom and the making of his reign a blessing to his subjects. In his position of prominence, and surrounded by the distinctions of royalty, David thought often of his beloved Jonathan, now deceased, whose throne he sat upon. One day, in a reminiscent mood, he asked, "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" King David sought a descendant of Saul, not to put him to death as most heathen kings would have done, but in order that he might show kindness to him. He wanted to show kindness to Saul's house for Jonathan's sake. He remembered the love which Jonathan had shown to him. David did not deem it beneath his dignity to inquire about the humblest or the poorest subject in his realm in order that he might lift him from his obscurity and supply his needs.

Ziba told David that Jonathan had a son, Mephibosheth, who was lame in both of his feet and dwelt in the house of Machir in Lodebar. Lodebar means "the place of no pasture, dry ground," and is sometimes referred to as "the place of no bread." That is where all sinners dwell -- in the place of distance and famine with nothing to satisfy the soul. Sin impoverishes us by robbing us of our rights and riches. The sinner is starving for the Bread of Life and dying in thirst for the Water of Life.

Mephibosheth, lame in his feet, correctly pictures to us the spiritual condition of every one of Adam's descendants. Every sinner is lame as to his understanding. "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Paul speaks of the unsaved as, "Having the understanding darkened." The sinner's affections are lame. So is his will power. Notice that Mephibosheth was lame in both feet. Every sinner is likewise completely lame, and cannot get to God unaided. Every part of his being is vitiated by sin. Listen to Paul's description of man's spiritual state: "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

Mephibosheth had been in this condition ever since he was a child. When he was a child, his nurse had dropped him as she fled with him when the news of the death of Saul and of Jonathan had come to her, and his lameness was a result of this fall. This is likewise true of the sinner, for every child is born with a nature and a disposition which inclines toward sin. Mephibosheth is certainly an illustration of the condition of every sinner who is without God and without hope in this world. He was fearful and hiding from the king, his best friend. He was destitute, for he had nothing. He was helpless -- "lame in both feet."

David wanted to show kindness to the house of Saul, his enemy, for Jonathan's sake. David showed remembering grace -- he did not forget Jonathan. He showed painstaking grace -- he ordered a thorough search for a possible descendant of his friend. He showed overwhelming grace when he found an object to love. The grace which David showed to Mephibosheth was a little sample, as it were, of the infinite and amazing grace of our Lord.

The Scriptures are silent about the journey from Lodebar to King David's palace. The events are included in one word, "fetched." This word is not used often, but it is very expressive. It means not only "tell him to come," but it implies "provide all the means for his coming." Grace does not look down from the mouth of the pit and call upon the sinner to crawl up to where it can reach down the helping hand. It goes down itself into the very depths to lift him out of the miry clay. This is exactly what our blessed Lord does. He not only invites us to come to Him, but He sends One to conduct us to Him, and then He provides for all the exigencies of our coming.

Mephibosheth had never seen David, knew little about him, and was fearful of the consequences if he went to Jerusalem. They told him he had nothing to fear and tried to convince him that the king was his friend. But he went to the palace of David with no little misgiving. In humility he presented himself to the king. Lame as he was, "He fell on his face, and did reverence." "He bowed himself, and said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?" His physical infirmity, combined with long-continued dependence, made him not merely humble, but timid, anxious, abject and self-depreciatory. He knew that David had the power to slay him if he so desired. He knew that David had the power to confiscate all the goods which belonged to the house of Saul, or the power to restore all to him, as an act of grace. Trembling in his presence Mephibosheth must have expected death, but nothing except grace was meted out to him.

David saw more than the crippled boy that morning. In the dim background he saw the face of one whom he loved, the face of a young man of whom the Book said that his love for David was passing the love of woman, the face of one who had saved David from many a murderous attack upon his life by his own father, the face of one whose soul clove to the soul of David, the face of one who had laid down his life on Gilboah for an unworthy father. As David saw Jonathan's face in that background, his heart went out in a great rush of tenderness and loving ministry to the crippled boy for the sake of another.

How welcome the royal "Fear not" must have been to the fearful young man! What a surprise it must have been to him, being altogether different from what he really expected! David restored to him all that he had lost and bestowed upon him a distinguished honor. He was determined that Mephibosheth should be a free and constant guest at his table. He raised him from social obscurity and degradation to a position of greatest distinction. He commanded Ziba to cultivate the estate and give to this cripple half the proceeds. He was received in his deformity, just as he was, and was received for the sake of another. He went from poverty to plenty through the grace of the king. He was perfectly satisfied with the provision which David made for him. The kindness which he received was both unmerited and unsought. It was shown to him on account of some one else who was very near the heart of the king. This is true magnanimity, real greatness. It has been said, to do good to those who love us is natural; to do evil to those who do us good is devilish; but to do good to those who do us evil is godlike. Than this case there is not in

the Bible a more apt illustration of the exceeding grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, who condescends to our low estate, seeks us out, bows us down in wondering submission by His matchless gentleness, and then raises us to the honor of being members of His household, giving us free access to His person and closest fellowship with Himself and those most dear to Him. David gave Mephibosheth his personal guarantee that henceforth he would be regarded "as one of the king's sons," and that ample provision would be made for all his needs.

What part did Mephibosheth have in being lifted up. We observe at once that he did not approach the king and ask him to lift him up. David had to send for him. So sinners must be invited, urged and brought unto the Lord. Salvation is purely a gift from God. "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." If I were to offer you a present as a gift, it would be an insult if you were to get down on your knees and beg me for the present which I had already offered you. All that would be necessary to receive it would be to reach out and accept it. God offers salvation as a gift, so it is an insult to God for a lost sinner to beg God for salvation when God has already offered it to him as a gift. What the lost person needs to do is to receive God's gift. "But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name." Mephibosheth was not lifted up by anything which he did. In all the Bible there is no passage which shows the helplessness of the sinner more than this scripture we have before us. No sinner is ever saved by what he does. He is never lifted out of his sinful estate by his own deeds. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us."

David not only showed kindness to Mephibosheth, but he also restored his inheritance. "And will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father." Saul had had great wealth, and David restored this to the lame grandson. Salvation is more than a pardon of sin. God gives the sinner more than a pardon; He gives him an inheritance. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance in corruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." "The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together."

David also permitted Mephibosheth to eat at the king's table. "And thou shalt eat bread at my table continually." There was nothing for Mephibosheth to pay and no conditions for him to meet. What difference did it make if he was lame in both feet, David was going to permit him to eat at his table, along with his own sons. How marvelously this described our experience in Christ. He was not lifted up just temporarily, but he was lifted up continually. How we thank God for a Saviour who not only saves, but who keeps one saved. "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers; nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Those who accept Christ will dwell with Him and enjoy the royal fare.