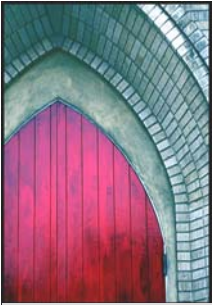


THE PERSISTENCE OF REDEMPTION

David and Mephibosheth

TEXT:

2 SAMUEL 9:1-13 (ESV)



Rev. Russ Ramsey
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Oak Hills
Presbyterian Church,
Overland Park,
Kansas

A Pretty Good Week:

This past week, Lisa and I welcomed into the world and into our family Jane Claire Ramsey, born March 7. I wear on my wrist a little plastic bracelet identifying me as Jane's father. No one else has one like it except Lisa. Jane is ours. And God gave her to us. And we are grateful to Him for her. The bracelet I wear is actually the 2nd one issued to identify me as Jane's father. The first was for our stay on the maternity wing of the hospital the days immediately following her birth.

This one, however, was snapped on my wrist when we had to have Jane admitted back into the hospital just two days ago because she was jaundiced—her tiny liver was still learning to keep up with its workload. And she was turning orange—like a little Cheeto. But for something as common and treatable as jaundice, I must tell you that Lisa and I both felt, at times, very lonely before God. I was reminded again that I have expectations for how I believe the Lord should deal with me. Much of the time my expectation is that it is His role to shelter me and those I love from trials. When hard times come, I feel forgotten by Him, as though He has forgotten the arrangement I often presume—life is supposed to play to my favor.

In preparation for this sermon, my thoughts kept turning to one of my favorite texts in all of Scripture—the story of King David and a crippled man named Mephibosheth. This text reminds us that if we're going to know God's redemption in our lives, we must accept it on His terms, not ours—and one of the terms of His redemption is that we always remain **dependent** upon Him. His agenda is not to set us free of our need for Him, but to teach us how to live as ones who rest upon Him alone.

I bring this text with a tender heart this morning knowing that Lisa and I were very fortunate—and that many here in this room have known deep, deep pain and grief—and have not only felt forgotten, but perhaps smitten by God as well—and you've got the bracelets to prove it. To you, let me say this. My prayer this morning is that you would see in this passage, by the grace of God's illuminating Holy Spirit, how kind it is for God to leave us dependent upon Him—and how He who is rich in mercy not only meets our needs but calls us sons & daughters.

2 Samuel 9:1-13

¹David said, "Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" ²Now there was a servant of the house of Saul whose name was Ziba, and they called him to David. And the king said to him, "Are you Ziba?" And he said, "I am your servant." ³And the king said, "Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God to him?" Ziba said to the king, "There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in his feet." ⁴The king said to him, "Where is he?" And Ziba said to the king, "He is in the house of

Machir the son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar." ⁵Then King David sent and brought him from the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar. ⁶And Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, son of Saul, came to David and fell on his face and paid homage. And David said, "Mephibosheth!" He answered, "Behold, I am your servant." ⁷David said to him, "Do not fear, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan, and I will restore to you all the land of Saul your father, and you shall eat at my table always." ⁸He paid homage and said, "What is your servant, that you should show regard for a dead dog such as I?"

⁹Then the king called Ziba, Saul's servant, and said to him, "All that belonged to Saul and to all his house I have given to your master's grandson. ¹⁰And you and your sons and your servants shall till the land for him and shall bring in the produce, that your master's grandson may have bread to eat. But Mephibosheth your master's grandson shall always eat at my table." Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. ¹¹Then Ziba said to the king, "According to all that my lord the king commands his servant, so will your servant do." So Mephibosheth ate at David's table, like one of the king's sons. ¹²And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Mica. And all who lived in Ziba's house became Mephibosheth's servants. ¹³So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, for he ate always at the king's table. Now he was lame in both his feet.

The Restored: A Shameful Prince

On its own, it's a strange little story, but in context, it is an amazing picture of the Gospel. In that day, the sons of kings became kings after their fathers died, so whenever someone usurped the throne from a king, they had to not only dispose of the king, but also the king's sons. Earlier (^{2 Sam 4:4}) we find that when Saul, the first King of Israel, and his son Jonathan died in battle, the nurse of Jonathan's son Mephibosheth, took him and fled—knowing this young prince's life was in danger. As she fled, she tripped and dropped him and he fell. Mephibosheth was five when he fell and became crippled in both legs.

Who was this Mephibosheth? When you come across a name in the Bible, there is often a meaning attached—either regarding the individual or God's intent to use them. Mephibosheth's name literally meant, "a shameful thing." What a picture! The king shows God's kindness to one named "shameful." Still, he was the son of Jonathan" (^{vs 2}), born into a royal family with the hope of one day assuming the throne. But Samuel the prophet brought the news that God had rejected Saul and had chosen David to assume the throne. So Mephibosheth, though born a prince, had been cut off from his royal inheritance because of his grandfather's disobedience. And because of his bloodline, he had lived as a fugitive from the king now for 20 years.

Vs 3 tells us "He was crippled in **both feet**." Not just one foot, both. Think of the inability of this man. Israel's terrain was jagged. He couldn't go anywhere without being picked up and carried—a condition which **never** changed. He knew he could die if the king found him because he was an heir of Saul. But he was **powerless** to flee. The severity of his situation was in the fact that the king looked for him and found him—and had Mephibosheth brought before him, helpless.

Mephibosheth was a fugitive, former prince from the line of David's enemy Saul, and he was crippled in both feet. He was a man born with everything and stripped of everything all in one afternoon, as his father and grandfather fell in battle. His name meant "a shameful thing" and he lived in Lo Debar—"a land with no pasture." This was Mephibosheth. This is every man before God. We are, in our fugitive fashion, shameful people hiding in a land with no pasture before the king sends for us. Is there hope in this? Absolutely, because the King does send for us!!!

The Restorer:

David asked, "Is there anyone left from the house of Saul?" (vs. 1) David takes the initiative here to restore Mephibosheth. So it is with our God. He is a pursuing God. Scripture testifies of this. God sought Noah to build the Ark. He sought Abraham in Ur, Jacob in Bethel, Moses in Midian, David himself through Samuel, Isaiah in a vision from heaven, Jeremiah in Jerusalem, Hosea in the crumbling Northern Kingdom, Jonah in the sea, the disciples on the shores of Galilee and Saul on the road to Damascus. It is God who seeks the sinner, never the other way around.

Notice the object of David's quest. We need to get this. David was seeking an heir to **Saul's** throne. Saul was the man who chased David into the wilderness more than once. He was always trying to kill David. Saul threw spears at him... twice... during concerts David was giving in the king's honor (1 Sam 18:10, 19:9). It was so bad that David hid in caves and even lived with the Philistines (remember Goliath!) so that Saul wouldn't find him. Mephibosheth was Saul's descendant. He had nothing to offer the king. In fact, he spent his life hiding from the king. How much more are we fugitives from God? We have hurled our arrogance like spears at Him more times than we can count, hoping to make Him go away or comply. Yet, whenever God seeks anyone, He always seeks a sinner with nothing to offer.

Now notice the reason for David's quest—to show kindness "for Jonathan's sake." (vs. 1) David and Jonathan were friends, and Jonathan, knowing God's favor was on David to take his father's throne, asked David to show kindness to his family. David swore it. A.W. Pink wrote, "Though there was nothing whatever in Saul's survivor to commend him unto the royal favor, David found a reason outside of him, in that bond of love and friendship which existed between his heart and Jonathan."

It's the same between the Christian and God. Paul wrote, "He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit Whom He poured out on us generously through Christ our Savior, so that having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs, having the hope of eternal life." (Titus 3:5-7) So much of the beauty in this text is in the fact that Mephibosheth is being acted upon by the King, whose objective is to find and show kindness to one who assumes the King wants him dead.

The Terms of the Restoration:

It is also challenging because we see that **David** sets the **terms** of restoration. It was his promise to keep. Mephibosheth was in no position to negotiate, only to submit. This position is what many of us fear most—almost as if the intrusion of God in our lives will ruin what we want—as if His presence and what we want conflict. Beloved, His restoration may not look like we think it should. What did it look like for Mephibosheth?

"**King David had him brought...**" (vs. 5) David didn't wait to see if there was anyone left from Saul's house. He sent for Mephibosheth—who, ironically, would have been personally unable to respond on his own even if he wanted to without the help of some brave soul to carry him before the king.

When Mephibosheth arrived, **David said, 'Mephibosheth!'**" (vs. 6) David knew his name! He called him by his name, just as the great Shepherd knows His sheep by name (Jn 10:3). God does this often. He called Moses, Zaccheus, Mary at the tomb, Joseph and Saul all by name. If you are a believer in Christ, you are known by name and dearly loved. **Then David said, "Do not be afraid..."** (vs. 7) Remember, he stood before the king probably expecting to hear his death sentence—this fugitive of Saul's line. But David blows his mind. **Don't be afraid.**

"**I will restore to you all...**" (vs. 7) If there is any part of this story we are likely to be at ease with, it is here. David gives back all Mephibosheth was once entitled to. The terms of this restoration takes a man who lost everything and returns it all to him. He can start over again, no longer as a fugitive—at peace.

But finally David says, "**And you will always eat at my table.**" (vs. 7) These few words contain the struggle we all feel. On the one hand, it is nice of David to offer this, but it sure seems a bit excessive. Couldn't he have just invited Mephibosheth for one meal? That way, Mephibosheth could have gone home to all that was now his. Wouldn't that be easier? That way the king wouldn't have to see the crippled son of his nemesis Saul day in and day out, and Mephibosheth wouldn't have to parade his shame all over the king's palace day in and day out. But these are the terms. And they are the terms the King sets.

The Persistence of Redemption:

Every day of his life Mephibosheth would eat at the King's table like one of the King's sons, but never once did he carry himself to the table. He spent his life being carried in the arms of another. This is where my heart wanted to rebel this week when we had to return to the hospital with Jane. We cry out, "If you really want to restore me, let me walk on my own." But the King says, "If you really want to be restored, sit at my table." God is not about to give us autonomy from Him. Autonomy from Him is the essence of everything that is wrong in this world.

Mephibosheth hears David's kindness and says, "Who am I that you would notice a dead dog like me?" He was crying uncle. Perhaps he rehearsed this, like the prodigal son rehearsed his homecoming speech, but he is not responded to. Rather, like the prodigal's father who orders the finest calf to be slaughtered for a feast, David summons people to begin caring for this man's land and life. And he gives this fugitive the treatment of a son... a prince! It is not enough to acknowledge that God lifts us up out of our filth. He does even more! He sets us at His table and we **always** dine there as His children. But know this too. If Mephibosheth were to continue to refer to himself as a dead dog, day after day, year after year, it would be because he refused to acknowledge His king's restoration.

Restoration does not come through God making us strong enough to live without Him. He drives us to lean hard on His grace with all we have and are. But it also liberates us to know that to Him, we are not dead dogs, worthless and vile, but we are His sons and daughters. As much as we love our own, He loves us more. We cannot bring ourselves before His throne. We must be carried. But beloved, we are... by Him, always.