

Mephibosheth (exterminating the idol)

I know that title may sound alarming, as in, how could a sermon about a guy whose name I can't pronounce, be of any interest to me at all?

But I think you will be surprised and pleased, as Mephibosheth and David paint a perfect picture of the relationship between us as the Church, and Christ; how God the Father can look at us but only see the righteousness of His Son. But before we can see that, we have some background to develop.

We start in I Samuel 18. This takes place immediately after David kills Goliath and Saul inquires as to whose son he is. David tells him at the end of chapter 17.

I Samuel 18:1-4

Now it came about, when he had finished speaking to Saul, that Jonathan committed himself to David, and Jonathan loved him as himself [The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David and Jonathan loved him as his own soul]. And Saul took him that day and did not let him return to his father's house. ³ Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. ⁴ Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his military gear, including his sword, his bow, and his belt.

This event has spiritual significance because Jonathan, as Saul's son, is switching his allegiance from his natural birth family to David. He might know, but probably doesn't, that God has already ordained David as king of Israel in his father's place (this occurs in I Samuel 16:13). Saul represents the flesh, David represents the Spirit, and Jonathan is choosing David over his father's household. In so doing, Jonathan is giving up his rightful pathway to the throne of Israel, and instead choosing to follow David. This is a picture of us giving up dominion of self and allowing Christ to rule over us.

When Jonathan and David make a covenant, they literally cut a covenant, walking a figure 8 between an animal that is cut in two and laid with the halves opposite each other. They would pronounce blessings and curses on each other for obedience to or neglect of the covenant. (Scriptural references to covenant practices are found in Genesis 15:8-20; Genesis 26:26-33.)

So now we have a covenant between Jonathan and David, but there is more to the story.

As Galatians 4:29 says, “But as at that time the son who was born according to the flesh persecuted the one who was born according to the Spirit, so it is even now.”

The flesh always persecutes the Spirit. The two are in constant battle, and much of biblical conflict is a picture of this. So it is with Saul and David. After Jonathan and David cut a covenant, Saul gets jealous of David and wants to kill him (flesh persecuting the Spirit). Saul assures Jonathan that he has no animosity toward David, but that’s a lie. In I Samuel 20:12-17, Jonathan extends his covenant with David to include not just themselves, but their lineage. In verse 15, Jonathan says,

“And you shall never cut off your loyalty to my house, not even when the LORD cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth.”

Now, David is bound by covenant not only to Jonathan personally, but to all of Jonathan’s descendants as long as David is alive (and since Christ is eternal, our covenant relationship with the Father is also eternal).

Now, the sad end of Jonathan. David must flee Saul, and years pass. But in Chapter 31 of I Samuel, Saul and his sons, including Jonathan, are killed in battle by the Philistines.

At this point, David is now free to become king over Israel. That occurs in 2 Samuel, Chapter 5. Before that, however, in Chapter 4, we learn about Mephibosheth, Jonathan’s son.

In verse 4, we are told:

“Now Jonathan, Saul’s son, had a son who was disabled in both feet. He was five years old when the news of Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel, and his nurse picked him up and fled. But it happened that in her hurry to flee, he fell and could no longer walk. And his name was Mephibosheth.”

This is the first mention of Mephibosheth. He is the son of Jonathan, and heir of a covenant with David about which he knows absolutely nothing. All he knows is that David would likely kill him if he learned about him because he would be a rightful heir to Saul’s throne, who was David’s enemy.

To make matters much, much worse, David develops a loathing for crippled people because of what happens in Chapter 5 of 2 Samuel:

⁶ Now the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land; and they said to David, “You shall not come in here, but *even* those who are blind and those who limp will turn you away,” thinking, “David cannot enter here.” ⁷ Nevertheless, David captured the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David. ⁸ And David said on that day, “Whoever strikes the Jebusites is to reach those who limp and those who are blind, who are hated by David’s soul, through the water tunnel.” For that reason they say, “People who are blind and people who limp shall not come into the house.”

So, David hates those who are blind and lame because of the taunt of the Jebusites, and Mephibosheth is lame! Something has to give, but what is it?

Similarly, our sin is hated by God, just as David hated the lameness of Mephibosheth, but can a covenant relationship create holy blindness? Let’s see!

In Chapter 9 of 2 Samuel, David has conquered all his enemies and is somehow reminded of his covenant with Jonathan.

⁹ Then David said, “Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul, so that I could show him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” ² Now *there was* a servant of the house of Saul whose name was Ziba, and they summoned him to David; and the king said to him, “Are you Ziba?” And he said, “*I am* your servant.” ³ Then the king said, “Is there no one remaining of the house of Saul to whom I could show the kindness of God?” And Ziba said to the king, “There is still a son of Jonathan, one who is disabled in both feet.”

Ziba tells David there is a descendant of Jonathan, but that he is lame in both his feet, no doubt thinking that David would have no further interest since David has declared that the blind and lame will never be welcomed in his presence. Imagine Ziba’s surprise with David’s response:

⁴ 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.” ⁵ Then King David sent ^[a]messengers who brought him from the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, from Lo-debar.

Lo-debar means, “without pasture.” It was a howling wasteland, where Mephibosheth was living in fear from King David. This is a picture of us before salvation, fearing God, hiding from Him, thinking all he wants to do is destroy us.

⁶ Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, came to David and fell on his face and prostrated himself. And David said, “Mephibosheth.” And he said, “Here is your servant!”

At this point, Mephibosheth must surely think that he has been brought to David for execution, to rid David of another rival to his throne. But that is not what happens.

⁷ Then David said to him, “Do not be afraid, for I will assuredly show kindness to you for the sake of your father Jonathan, and I will restore to you all the ^[a]land of your ^[b]grandfather Saul; and you yourself shall ^[c]eat at my table regularly.” ⁸ Again he prostrated himself, and said, “What is your servant, that you should be concerned about a dead dog like me?”

This is the good news of the gospel! Surely, as sinners, God wants nothing to do with us. But David IGNORES the lameness of Mephibosheth, looking instead at the fact that Mephibosheth, warts and all, is a descendant of Jonathan and beneficiary of the covenant that Jonathan has with David. That relationship covers Mephibosheth’s lameness! Just like Jesus’ blood covers our sin!

And notice Mephibosheth’s reaction. He doesn’t say, “Well, it’s about time you recognized my worthiness to be with you in spite of my lameness. You really need to get over that, King David.”

No, instead he says, “What is your servant, that you should be concerned about a dead dog like me?”

That's humility. That's a beggar realizing they have nothing to offer the King. That's The Beatitudes, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

⁹ Then the king summoned Saul's servant Ziba and said to him, "Everything that belonged to Saul and to all his house I have given to your master's ^[a]grandson. ¹⁰ You and your sons and your servants shall cultivate the land for him, and you shall bring in *the produce* so that your master's grandson will have food ^[b]to eat; nevertheless Mephibosheth, your master's grandson, shall ^[c]eat at my table regularly." Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. **¹¹ Then Ziba said to the king, "In accordance with everything that my lord the king commands his servant, so your servant will do." So Mephibosheth ate at ^[d]David's table as one of the king's sons. ¹² Mephibosheth had a young son whose name was Mica. And all who lived in the house of Ziba were servants to Mephibosheth. ¹³ So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he ate at the king's table regularly. And he was disabled in his two feet.**

Mephibosheth was brought in daily to the King's dining room to eat at his table just as the King's sons were. Even though he was lame in his two feet. His disability did not in any way detract from his status as a son of the King. This, folks, is how God sees us when we trust in the blood of His Son as our righteousness! Nothing else matters to the Father. We honor the Son, so the Father honors us.

When we start to think we aren't worthy of the King's favor, let's remember that neither was Mephibosheth. He was unworthy, but he benefited from the covenant between Jonathan and David, a covenant in which Mephibosheth entered without effort! So, too, when we trust in the blood of Christ as our righteousness, we enter into a covenant relationship with the Father without effort on our part! The work is done by Christ. Praise God for His mercy and grace, and for leaving us a visible picture of how we too can benefit from a covenant sacrifice made by others.