

Truth for Today

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The New is in the Old concealed: So Mephibosheth...

When King David came to the throne of Israel, he wanted to commemorate a very close personal relationship he had had with Jonathan, the son of David's predecessor, King Saul. He was extremely anxious to honour that friendship by providing security and adequate resources for a surviving member of Saul's family.

This was very unusual. In those days it was normal for a new king ruthlessly to annihilate any surviving members of the previous royal family. This was to eliminate the possibility of any rebellion against his authority, or even an attempted coup. Instead, David was keen to show grace and kindness, if such an individual could be found.

On enquiry, David learned that the only trace of a family member was of a young man who was, in fact, a poor, miserable specimen of a creature, Mephibosheth by name.

Now, the prologue to what we are going to think about is given at the beginning of 2 Samuel 3, which says, "Now there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker." That is, the dynasty of the previous king Saul had declined and had been superseded by the dynasty of the new king David.

The personal history of Mephibosheth himself began very badly, and very sadly. He was only five years old when the news came from Mount Gilboa of the defeat and death in battle of his grandfather, King Saul, and also his father, Jonathan. On receiving the news, his nurse picked him up, and fled. In the haste of the flight, the boy fell while she was carrying him, and he became lame, indeed, fully lame, on both his feet. He was a helpless cripple for the rest of his life. The history of this is given in 2 Samuel 4.

Overall, everything was against him. First of all, he was born into the wrong family; that of which the head, Saul had been an implacable enemy of David. Secondly, he was living in the wrong place – Lodebar, a place without pasture. There was nothing there to sustain him, nothing to feed upon. Presumably, he was in exile, hoping to escape the treatment he feared would be his due from the regal authority of King David. Thirdly, he was on the wrong side – a member of a defeated family. His seniors had been vanquished in battle, and he had inherited the continuing stigma of being one of that defeated family. Fourthly, he was absolutely helpless – lame on both his feet. He was totally immobile, incapable of doing anything on his own behalf.

On enquiry, David learned that this helpless young man was in the land of Lodebar, a land devoid of pasture. "Right", said David, "he's ideal. Fetch him back here at my expense." And so this helpless young man was fetched out of that arid land and brought to the King's palace. What a contrast, between where he had been, the circumstances in which he was found, and that which was available in the presence of the king!

But, to his credit was the fact that he was content to receive blessing as a free gift from David, accepting that in himself he deserved nothing. He acknowledged himself to be no better than a dead dog. When you think about it, dogs can be, and often are, very desirable and useful either as working dogs, show dogs, or as personal pets or companions. However, there cannot be anything more useless than a dead dog. To describe himself as such really shows how useless Mephibosheth realized himself to be. In response, David said, "Don't worry. It's not what you are that counts. What I want to commemorate is my love for your father Jonathan. For His sake, I am determined to bless you and be kind to you. A secure inheritance shall be yours and you will be a permanent personal guest at my meal table."

Mephibosheth was granted absolute security. Never again would he fear being overtaken by enemies or judgment. Never again would he have to worry about having his needs met. He and his household were provided with the best of everything, supplied by and at the expense of the king. Ziba, a servant of Saul's household, was given the honour and responsibility of being steward to administer, on Mephibosheth's behalf, and for Mephibosheth's benefit, all the resources David provided. There was one proviso. Mephibosheth himself would enjoy the favour of dining personally at David's own dining table, and in David's own presence.

“As for Mephibosheth, said the king, he shall eat at my table, as one of the king’s sons. So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem: for he did eat continually at the king’s table; and was lame on both his feet.”

That is, even as he enjoyed the king’s bounty, he was always, ever conscious of the fact that he could never have got there as a result of any endeavour of his own. Nor could he leave and resume his former life, even if he had wanted to. In himself he was still, and always would be, completely immobile.

Is that the end of the story? Not at all! Like all of us, even King David himself found that life can be full of ups and downs, or perhaps more accurately, full of downs and ups. Perhaps you have heard the saying, “For the Christian, life is full of ups and downs, but the last movement will be up, when Christ comes and takes us up to be with Himself, forever and ever”. We shall be eternally grateful for that.

In Mephibosheth’s case, having been blessed in such a magnanimous way, he was subsequently true and faithful to his deliverer, when David himself had later to go into exile. This is a clear picture of the present day Christian who is true to Christ, His beloved Saviour and Lord, even though at present the world at large wants nothing at all to do with the Lord Jesus.

Later, as described in chapter 16, when David was reinstated to the throne, Mephibosheth was betrayed by Ziba, who proved himself to be an unfaithful steward. Ziba misrepresented him to David, saying that Mephibosheth had sought the throne for himself. In fact, all the time David was in exile Mephibosheth had mourned on David’s behalf.

Later again, when the true facts were given to David, Mephibosheth bore his disloyal servant no grudge. David suggested that the gifts he had made available should be shared between Mephibosheth and Ziba. Mephibosheth was much more interested in the fact that his beloved master David had been restored to the throne. “Let Ziba have it all”, he said. “I’m not interested in material possessions.” The fact that David was back where he deserved to be was good enough reward for Mephibosheth.

On his part, King David also was true to his own word. We read in chapter 21 that there was a famine in the days of David which lasted three years. When David enquired of the LORD, he was told that it was because King Saul in his day had defaulted on a promise he had made to spare the Gibeonites, but had in fact killed some. David found himself in a position where he was committed to execute seven surviving members of Saul’s family in reparation. However, he insisted on keeping his promise to provide continuing care for Mephibosheth.

Now, what can we learn from the history and experience of Mephibosheth? We considered earlier David’s express concern. Someone should be found, of the family of King Saul, who should be blessed, not for what he himself deserved, not for what he was in himself, but because of the love of David for Jonathan.

The link is given in the New Testament, in 1 John 2:12. The Apostle John tells his readers, “I write unto you, children, because your sins are forgiven you for His Name’s sake.” That chapter gives much attention to progress in the things of God, and advancement towards spiritual maturity. One of the things that God would have us mature in, is the way in which such a fundamental aspect of our salvation as the forgiveness of sins enhances the fame and renown of His Son.

Again, we can surely apply the Bible statement, “Ye meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.” This does not diminish in any way the responsibility of man who has sinned. But, the grace of God is great. Spiritually, we are poverty-stricken. We have nothing at all to offer to find favour with God. We have nothing to sacrifice to mitigate His wrath. We have no way in which to vindicate His righteous claims upon us. But, such is the grace of God that He has used such circumstances as a platform for the demonstration of His own great love for His well-beloved Son.

We Christians have experienced the necessary repentance of heart. We have availed ourselves of the great and eternal salvation that has been won for us. We have learned to love the One Who loved us and gave Himself for us. We at first perhaps rejoiced only in the wonderful blessing that is undoubtedly ours. But we have also found that our souls are now in a fit and suitable condition for God to lead us, rather more intelligently, into the various distinct, yet never conflicting, aspects of all that has taken place. One such aspect is surely found in this verse. “I write unto you, children, because your sins are forgiven you for His Name’s sake.” So that now, any sinner, regardless of the number, or the magnitude, or the grossness, of his sins, finds that if he only pleads the Name of Jesus, all his sins are forgiven. Yet another demonstration has taken place of God’s own appreciation of His well-beloved Son. Obviously, the forgiveness cannot possibly be granted for the sinner’s name’s sake. His spiritual condition negatives that. We ourselves have surely learned that lesson from our own experience, if we are real, at all. The scriptures themselves clearly confirm that experience both by way of illustration and teaching.

Let us put together those two well-known passages of scripture in Luke 15 and the beginning of Ephesians 2. Together, they give us one of those remarkably composite pictures that only scripture can really give, of all that

characterised us, away from God. The lost coin, insensible, didn't know it was lost, not one spark of response Godward, dead in trespasses and in sins. The wayward sheep, incapable, didn't know how to get back, walking according to the course of this world. The younger son, insubordinate, didn't want to be back, children of disobedience.

How clear the picture is. We were like the lost coin, the wayward sheep, the younger son. We were insensible, incapable, insubordinate. We didn't know we were lost, we didn't know how to get back, we didn't want to be back. We "were dead in trespasses and in sins, wherein, in time past, we walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience, among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others".

Such was our spiritual state. The previous chapter, Luke 14, gives us the same unhappy portrait of our condition before God. As far as qualifying for salvation is concerned, we were "poor, maimed, lame and blind". We were poor, we couldn't pay for it. We were maimed, we couldn't work for it. We were lame, we had to be carried there. We were blind, we needed guidance every step of the way. As the following verse in that chapter tells us, it must be said of such, "They cannot recompense". Clearly, if there was to be any basis at all for the forgiveness of sins, it could not be found in the sinner.

Who was there, then, who could be looked upon with favour? Who was there, then, suitable as a channel that the grace of God might flow? Surely, if one was to be found at all, it could only be the One Who was eternally the delight of the heart of God; the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It could be said, prophetically, of Him, "Then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him, and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him, rejoicing in the habitable part of His earth; and My delights were with the sons of men". How precious that shows His suitability as a channel for the grace of God to flow out to man!

That last touch is very sweet. "My delights were with the sons of men." Not only suitable, and capable, but willing. Here, then, was One Who could be looked upon with favour. Here, then was One Who could be taken up, as a channel, that the grace of God might flow out to man. Here, then, was One for Whose Name's sake our sins could be forgiven. Here, then, was One of Whom the Apostle John could write, "I write unto you, children, because your sins are forgiven you for His Name's sake." We are moved very much when someone confesses Christ as Saviour. It is only right that we should. But let us not, on such occasions, rejoice only that another sinner has been blessed. That, in itself, is a cause for great rejoicing, in heaven, and upon earth. But let us, also, have our cups filled with this realisation. Yet another demonstration has taken place, in this poor, perishing world, of the love of God for His Son. In spite of the sinner's helplessness and hopelessness, God has forgiven his sins, simply because he has believed on the Name of Jesus. In effect, God says to the sinner, "If that is what you think of My Son, nothing is too good for you. I'm going to lavish the wealth of heaven upon you, and the first instalment is the forgiveness of sins". No doubt, then, the Apostle John's heart would be full as he penned the words, "I write unto you, children, because your sins are forgiven you for His Name's sake."

Like Mephibosheth in his day, no Christian could ever be blessed for what he is in himself, or as a result of his own achievements. It must be for the sake of another, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, on the basis of the value to God of the work of Christ on the Cross of Calvary. Again and again, the Bible tells us that the love of God for His only-begotten Son is absolutely unique, beyond compare. Every time a sinner trusts Christ as his Saviour, it is another expression or demonstration of the love of God for His Son. This is indeed the link. Mephibosheth is a very neat picture of the basis on which anyone can now be brought into the blessing of God; brought into the knowledge and joy of salvation.

Let me put it to you in the first person singular, because I know myself better than anyone else does. My spiritual predicament is a very strong parallel to the actual situation of Mephibosheth. Spiritually I am absolutely helpless, totally incapable of helping myself. I am totally dependent on the good grace of another. Only God Himself can deliver me out of the far country of sin, death and judgment. Only by the work of Christ, Who died for my sins and rose again for my justification, can I be brought into the spiritual blessing that God freely offers me, beginning with the forgiveness of sins.

Blessed be His precious Name!

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