

Last week we looked at the fruit of the Spirit of patience. And we noted that patience can be a tough one. This week we look at kindness. And this sounds easier, but true kindness may not be easier. And to look at kindness we are looking at 2 Samuel chapter 9. This is a long passage, but this is an example of true kindness, God’s kindness, shown by King David towards Mephibosheth.

2 Samuel 9

David asked, “Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan’s sake?”² Now there was a servant of Saul’s household named Ziba (Zeebah). They summoned him to appear before David, and the king said to him, “Are you Ziba?” “At your service,” he replied.³ The king asked, “Is there no one still alive from the house of Saul to whom I can show God’s kindness?” Ziba answered the king, “There is still a son of Jonathan; he is lame in both feet.”⁴ “Where is he?” the king asked. Ziba answered, “He is at the house of Makir (Macheer) son of Ammiel in Lo Debar.”⁵ So King David had him brought from Lo Debar, from the house of Makir son of Ammiel.⁶ When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor. David said, “Mephibosheth!” “At your service,” he replied.⁷ “Don’t be afraid,” David said to him, “for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table.”

⁸ Mephibosheth bowed down and said, “What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?”⁹ Then the king summoned Ziba, Saul’s steward, and said to him, “I have given your master’s grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family.¹⁰ You and your sons and your servants are to farm the land for him and bring in the crops, so that your master’s grandson may be provided for. And Mephibosheth, grandson of your master, will always eat at my table.” (Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.)¹¹ Then Ziba said to the king, “Your servant will do whatever my lord the king commands his servant to do.” So Mephibosheth ate at David’s^[a] table like one of the king’s sons.¹² Mephibosheth had a young son named Mika, and all the members of Ziba’s household were servants of Mephibosheth.¹³ And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king’s table; he was lame in both feet.”

Now this story of David and Mephibosheth has a long back story. And I want to give you a few key pieces of background information. Mephibosheth is the son of Jonathan. And Jonathan was the son of King Saul and a friend of David’s. When God chose David as the next king, King Saul got very angry and did everything to sabotage David and attempted to kill David several times. Jonathan stayed a true friend to David through all of this. Eventually a war basically breaks out between the house of Saul and the house of David. In the midst of all this they are fighting the Philistines as well. And eventually Saul and Jonathan both die on the battle field. And this is actually where we meet Mephibosheth for the first time. When Saul and Jonathan die, the nurse flees with 5 year old Mephibosheth, and while fleeing he either falls or is dropped, and he is crippled on both feet. That is in 2 Samuel chapter 4 if you want to look it up. Now Saul and Jonathan’s deaths secure David becoming king. But some of David’s followers are over ambitious and think Saul’s house should be wiped out and several of Saul’s other family members are killed as a result. And it was actually common to eliminate all members of a former dynasty to ensure the success of a new king. But David did not approve of these killings. He punished those responsible.

So as we come to chapter 9, David is now king, he has become very successful and powerful, he has moved the ark, he is building a new temple, he has appointed people to all of the important leadership positions, and then he takes the time to make things right with the house of Saul. The point I am making here is that David could get away with not bothering with this. David could even have gotten away with having Mephibosheth killed. But instead, despite that he is now very busy and very important and the house of Saul has no expectation to gain anything, David goes out of his way to show kindness to the house of Saul. David does not have to side track and seek out Mephibosheth, but he does. And that is the first point, that kindness is intentional. I made this same point about patience last week. All of these fruits are received from the Holy Spirit and then intentionally shared with others. David has a million other things he needs to be doing at this point, but he stops to make things right with the house of Saul.

Being busy is an issue for us 21st century westerners, isn't it? We get so busy. And showing kindness does sometimes require us to interrupt our business. It may require putting some of our business aside to intentionally share kindness with others. "There was a boy named Mark who was walking home from school one day when he noticed the boy ahead of him had tripped and dropped all of the books he was carrying, plus a sweater and baseball bat and glove. Mark knelt down and helped the boy pick up the scattered things. Since they were going the same way, he helped to carry the tall pile. As they walked Mark discovered the boy's name was Bill, that he loved video games, baseball and history, that he was having a lot of trouble with his other subjects and that he had just broken up with his girlfriend. They arrived at Bill's home first and Mark was invited in for a Coke and to watch some television. The afternoon passed pleasantly with a few laughs and some shared small talk, then Mark went home. They continued to see each other around school, had lunch together once or twice, then both graduated from junior high school. They ended up in the same high school where they had brief contacts over the years. Finally the long awaited senior year came, and three weeks before graduation, Bill asked Mark if they could talk. Bill reminded him of the day years ago when they had first met. "Did you ever wonder why I was carrying so many things home that day?" asked Bill. "You see, I cleaned out my locker because I didn't want to leave a mess for anyone else. I had stored away some of my mother's sleeping pills and I was going home to commit suicide. But after we spent some time together talking and laughing, I realized that if I had killed myself, I would have missed that time and so many others that might follow. So you see, Mark, when you picked up my books that day, you did a lot more. You saved my life." There are probably many many stories of kindness out there like this one. But notice Mark had to take time. He stopped heading home, he interrupted his afternoon plans, and took the time to walk Bill home and get to know him. We have to let go of some of our business in order to share kindness.

So David takes the time to seek out what is left of the line of Saul and that is Mephibosheth. The fact that Mephibosheth is lame also makes this even more interesting. Not only is he the only survivor of Saul's family, a defeated family, but he is also disabled. Because he is crippled he cannot fulfill religious or military functions, which means he cannot be an heir to the throne, even though he is the grandson of Saul. So David does not need to take care of this. David is the rightful king and he has the right to rule and he does not need to be bothered with Mephibosheth. But he goes out of his way to find the descendant of Saul, and when he asks Ziba if there is anyone left, she answers in verse 3 "There is still a son of Jonathan; he is lame in both feet." Notice she tells David right away that he is disabled. And yet this does not deter David. He goes to the lengths to bring him to Jerusalem, provide land and workers for him, and then puts him at his table for life. And he gives him all of Saul's original land. That is huge. Why do all this?

There is a hint for David's motivation for being kind to Mephibosheth. It is in verse 3 where David asks this "Is there no one still alive from the house of Saul to whom I can show God's kindness?" God's kindness. What does he mean by God's kindness? Well, David is very aware that all he has is from God. His success, his triumphs, everything is from God. Just read the Psalms and the songs of praise David wrote to God. David gave all the glory to God for everything. So he is giving God the credit for the kindness to be shown to Mephibosheth. Why is this? Because kindness is a fruit of the Spirit. We receive it through our relationship with God. And then we extend it to others.

I think motivation is important here. David's motivation is to show kindness to Mephibosheth for the benefit of Mephibosheth, not David. David is not doing this for his reputation or any other benefit. It is all for the benefit of the other person. David will actually lose the land that was Saul's by doing this, so it is not for any personal gain. I think this is important to note because I think we have all seen, either given or received, kindness that had other motivations, right? Have you ever experienced kindness from someone that did not feel genuine? That seemed like it was for their benefit and not yours? Or because they were going to want something in return? That is not the type of kindness we are looking for here. That is not God's kindness. When we show God's kindness it is all for the benefit of the other person. Everything David does in this passage is for the benefit of Mephibosheth. He makes sure he will have land, income, and be cared for.

In our responsive reading this morning God's kindness is also intended to lead us to repentance. Did you hear that in Romans this morning? Kindness leads to repentance. It is to get a positive response from us. That Romans passage is about people judging one another and how God is the one who judges, but it is God's kindness and patience (fruit from last week) that are intended to lead us to repentance. Now why would God's kindness lead us to repentance? This is where we start to look at how God's kindness is also part of God's grace. Go back to the story of David that we have here. Does Mephibosheth do anything at all to prompt or warrant what David does for him? No. David seeks out Mephibosheth. And then David gives him everything with no strings attached. That is how grace works isn't it? God seeks us out, not the other way around. And we do nothing to earn all the good God gives us, creation, provisions, salvation. God gives it all at God's prompting. And when we realize this, it should lead us to want to repent of the sin that God has fixed for us. That is how God's kindness leads to repentance. And Mephibosheth responds to David's kindness repentant. In verse 8 it says "Mephibosheth bowed down and said, "What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?" He bows down. He humbles himself. This is his response to David showing him God's kindness. It is the proper response to God's kindness.

Not only is God's kindness part of God's grace, but this whole passage about David and Mephibosheth is a mirror story of God's grace. Think about it. Mephibosheth is disabled. He can do nothing for himself and he is not looking for David to do anything for him, rather it is David who seeks out Mephibosheth. We are disabled by our sin. We can do nothing to fix it. And we do not seek God first, rather God seeks out us. Then look at what David does for Mephibosheth, look at verse 7, "Do not be afraid." Now how many times do we hear God say do not be afraid in the Bible? "Do not be afraid" or "fear not" is the most repeated phrase in the entire Bible. It appears 365 times. So David says to Mephibosheth "Do not be afraid...for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan." So David is showing kindness to him for the sake of his father who has died. Why does God show us kindness? Because we are adopted into the family of God that Jesus Christ has died for. We are saved for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. And then David says "I will

restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul.” Now think about that phrase. It has a lot of significance. David says I will restore to you. What does God’s grace do for us? Restores us to right relationship with God. We also, according to the Bible, receive an inheritance when we enter the kingdom of God. Mephibosheth is receiving the inheritance that belonged to his grandfather.

And then the last phrase “you will always eat at my table.” Whose table are we invited to? (point to communion table). We are always invited to the Lord’s table. We eat at the Lord’s table in this life and we are promised in the Bible that in the kingdom of heaven we will be present at a great feast. So this whole account of David and Mephibosheth is a foreshadow of God’s kindness being extended to us through Jesus Christ. It is the story of grace.

So I began by looking at what kindness should look like with each other. That we have to be intentional about it, we have to let go of businesses to share it, and our motivations need to be the benefit of the other person, not selfish or fake. But since then we have discovered how this is about God’s kindness to us. That God’s kindness is God’s grace. And that we are on the receiving end of kindness like Mephibosheth was. So I ask you, how do you respond? Do you respond like Mephibosheth? Do you bow down to the God showing you kindness? Do you humble yourself? Mephibosheth says “What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?” Now I am not saying you need to call yourself a dead dog, but honestly aren’t we all dead in our sin without God’s grace? Do we recognize the significance of the kindness of God? Before we worry about sharing it, do we accept it for what it means?

Friends, you have to receive it before it can be a fruit. If this is what kindness of God really is, God’s grace, then kindness really is from the Holy Spirit. Kindness is a fruit and shared because we are the recipients of God’s kindness. So when you bear the fruit of kindness, make sure it is God’s kindness. Make sure it is gracious. Make sure it is not self-seeking in any way. Make sure it has no strings attached. And do it because of the kindness shown to you. Share God’s kindness because God says to you, as David said to Mephibosheth, you will always eat at my table. Now let’s go to the Lord’s table together.