

Kindness of the King

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[0 : 00] We'll turn back to the passage we read a little while ago, 2 Samuel chapter 9. This is one of the great stories from the Old Testament.

If you read commentators on 2 Samuel 9, they'll often say that this is actually perhaps King David at his best in all of the Davidic story.

Because one commentator puts it, the moral climax of his entire kingship. Part of the reason for that is that it comes in a surprising place. On the front side of this passage and on the back side of this passage, David's at war and David is triumphing over his enemies and sending out his mighty men and really establishing his kingdom through violence and through war.

Even in the midst of that, you have the story that we read about David and Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel chapter 9. But for even a bigger reason than that, Christians for 20 centuries now have come to the David's story and known that David is so important in so many ways at so many different levels, the very first presentation of Jesus' identity.

When you flip the page from Old Testament to New Testament and you come to Matthew 1,1, the very first thing it says about Jesus Christ is Son of David. It doesn't say Son of Abraham first, it doesn't say Son of Adam or Son of God first, but Son of David.

[1 : 34] That's because David's importance for the whole of redemption history, for the identity of Jesus is not just about bloodline, but David is a particular type.

He is a shadow, he is something that we are being called in God's sacred weaving of history together to look at and say, this is what I need to be looking for, this is what true kingship is supposed to look like, and 2 Samuel 9 is that place.

It's the key place where many, many pastors and theologians and commentators have said, this is where to go to see the real shadow of the true king in the David story.

In fact, in the Hebrew Bible, Chronicles was originally the very last book. In Jesus' own time, the very last book of the Bible you would read is Chronicles and six times in Chronicles a narrative ends by saying, the Son of David, the king of Israel.

You turn the page to Matthew 1 and it's connecting Chronicles to Matthew and saying, the Son of David, Jesus Christ. This is his genealogy and even Jesus in Matthew 22, 42, he asked the Pharisees, who do you think the Christ is supposed to be?

[3 : 00] And the Pharisees said to him, he must be the Son of David. Everybody knew it. Everybody knew that David, it was more than bloodline, that there was something in David that was imaging forth the hope of the nations and that means that 2 Samuel 9 is a glimpse of true kingship.

So we're going to see two things this morning. First, the kindness of the king and then secondly, the mercy of the king. So let's dive in and look at that. The first thing here is the kindness of the king.

If you have a Bible, you'll see in verse one, David wants to give a gift and that gift we learn in verse one is the gift of kindness.

And then it repeats it in verse three and verse seven, but also in verse one, you have the reason why he wants to give the gift and says he wants to give the gift of kindness for Jonathan's sake.

And that means that there's a back story to what's going on here and it's a very common story but Saul, right, was the king of Israel.

[4 : 09] And Jonathan was Saul's son, the rightful heir of the bloodline lineage of the kingship. He was to be the next king. But God had come down and God had said, no, David, the son of Jesse is going to be the next king.

And so Saul, remember, he absolutely hates David for this. And in fact, he says at one point, if you want to know why was Saul so after David, why did he want to murder David?

This is what Saul says to his son, for as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you Jonathan nor your kingdom can be established. And so he wants David to die so that his blood lineage can be dynastic, he can be the king forever through his sons.

And in the midst of all this, Jonathan loves David. And it says he loves him so much, he loves him as he loves his own self. And 1 Samuel 18, Jonathan, who is to be the rightful king, the bloodline of the royal lineage, it says that he made a covenant with David by taking off his royal robe, taking off his tunic, even his sword, his bow and his belt, the text says, and he knelt before David and gave David his royal robe and his royal sword.

And you see what's happening in that moment. This is the son of the king, the rightful king shedding his royalty, stripping himself of what was owed to him at the point of the threat of death from his own father for the sake of a covenant bond that he had made with David because he loved him all the way to the bottom.

[5 : 52] He loved him as he loved himself. And so there was words exchanged there between David and Jonathan. And Jonathan says this to David, David, do not cut off your kindness to my house forever.

So he said, he takes off his royal robe and he says, David, my one request, my one condition in this covenant, do not cut off your kindness from my house, from my family.

And here it is, the years later, 2 Samuel 9, verse 1, David is, remembers, and he wants to give the gift of kindness that he had promised to his beloved friend Jonathan so long ago.

Kindness here is at the very center of what it means to make a covenant. And it's saying, I will be for you no matter what.

But at the same time, the word kindness is not heavy enough and it's not weighty enough and it doesn't capture all of what is happening in this moment.

[6 : 56] Because if there is one Hebrew word that's worth knowing, it is the word that stands behind the word kindness here. It's the very famous word, hesed, in Hebrew.

It's H-E-S-E-D in English. And it's so famous because this is the word that the Old Testament uses over and over again to demarcate the quality of God's love for people that he's chasing after.

This is the one word that the Old Testament chooses every time to say, what is the quality of God's love for human beings who have rebelled against him? And it's the word hesed every single time.

It normally is translated as steadfast loyalty or loving kindness. In the New Testament, many commentators will say the equivalent phrase is the mercy of God because it is a love that God extends in covenant to a humanity that doesn't even want him.

And so in the New Testament, it's the mercy of God. In the Old Testament, it's hesed. And that's the word that David shows right here. In fact, in verse three, you'll see that he says, I want to show someone the hesed of God.

[8 : 08] So he even says, I want to show the quality of God's love to somebody in Jonathan's family. David knows that this is how God loves and this is how I want to love.

And the quality marker of God's love for the world hesed, David is saying to us here, can be, it is possible for a human being to extend that type of love to another person.

That it's possible as the image of God, to image God by loving with hesed love like God unconditionally loves his covenant people. And so that's what David wants to do here.

Now, if you ask a little bit more, what is it? The point has been made by so many pastors and so many sociologists and social commentators the past 20 years that there are so many different types of relationships that we as modern people enter into all the time.

But by far and away, the most common relationship that every single one of us has with anybody in our lives is the modern retail relationship, the market relationship, the consumer relationship.

[9 : 20] Every single time you take a good from somewhere in any store and you bring it to the counter and you attempt to pay for it, you've immediately entered into a market retail contract.

It's very short lived, it's very fast. But in that type of relationship, you know how it works. If this person, if this company, if this individual does not meet my needs, if there's a better price down the road, if there's a better opportunity down the road, then I can go, I can leave, I can get out, I can drop this, I can search for something else.

Those relationships are so good when they are in the place that they're supposed to be. Retail relationships are so necessary when we enter into a place where we need a contractual relationship.

But HECID or covenant relationships are in some sense the polar opposite of the market relationship, of the retail relationship, of the consumer relationship in the modern world.

They're not need based. They're not anything like a market relationship in that individuals in them are not looking for a transaction of goods, an exchange of goods for the sake of mutual benefit.

[10 : 36] And instead, this is how one commentator puts covenant relationships like this, like David is calling for here. He says, HECID, covenant relationship is love that is willing to deeply commit itself to another person by making a solemn or sacred promise all the way to the point of great loss.

He writes, who finds freedom in sacrifice, who finds deep freedom in being human, in being self-sacrificial for the sake of another.

And another one writes it like this, this is the love of deep commitment. It's the love that does not leave when needs are not being met, but will lose in sacrifice for the sake of the relationship.

Now one pastor says it like this, market relationships, we all know this, market relationships have crept into the covenant relationships that we have as modern people.

Throughout the 20th and 21st century, it is not uncommon for us that market relationships creep in to the relationships that are meant to be covenantal, that are meant to be HECID, non-retail, non-consumeristic type relationships.

[11 : 55] And that goes from friendship to family to marriage into the church community sometimes even and all the way to the point of our relationship even with God.

That as modern people, we're always being tempted as individualists that if we do not get what we need from a relationship, we can get out. These HECID covenant communities and HECID covenant relationships are ones that stick together.

And this is such a great point on a first sermon back here, this being with you guys to offer because I tell people all the time when they ask about St. Columbus in the States, they ask, you know, what's St. Columbus like?

And I say every time, St. Columbus is a place that has a whole lot of covenant love. It's a place where people really stick together and where you see HECID covenant kindness that's living and active in a way that looks like an Acts 2.42 to 47 type church.

And it's unusual even though it shouldn't be in the life of the church and St. Columbus has it, and it's a gift of the spirit in the midst of this community and at the same time we're all sinners.

[13 : 18] And so all of us as a community and as individuals always have to be coming back and asking the question, as a modern person, has the retail consumeristic mentality of modernity crept into the crevices of the relationships in my life that I'm called to deeply covenant in.

And you know, one example of this is friendship, the seriousness in the Bible and in the book of Proverbs of friendship. You know the difference in covenant friendship and retail friendship.

Covenant friendship is marked off by, well as one person put it recently, covenant friendship is when you can get stabbed in the front and not in the back.

It's when your friend can speak the truth to you, can stab you in the front with words that wound for the sake of your soul, for the sake of bringing you back, for the sake of saying you're going down the wrong direction and it's okay, it doesn't break the relationship, it doesn't destroy the relationship, it falls underneath the Pauline paradigm of speaking the truth in love.

Because truth without love is harshness and it breaks relationships, but love without truth is superficial flattery and real friendship is being able to speak, covenant friendship is being able to speak truth and love, it's being able to even stab somebody in the front and never in the back because you really love them and want them to grow.

[14 : 52] It's not impossible for us to have these types of relationships, but it's never been harder than in the 21st century, than in the world of consumerism and individualism and the retail market relationships that we exist in day in and day out.

Now let me close this point by asking this question, how can David love like this? How does David, where are the resources in David's life to be able, the David that we know, the rest of the story of David, the David of David and Bathsheba and David and Uriah and all the struggles that David, where can, how can David get the resources to love like this?

And one of the ways to say it I think is the first time Heseb pops up in the Bible is in the Abraham story. And in the Abraham story, God comes down and says, I'm going to covenant with you, I'm going to, you will be my people no matter what.

And when it comes time to establish that covenant in Genesis 15, God enacts a covenant ceremony like David and Jonathan had enacted when Jonathan took off his royal robe and God tells Abraham, cut the turtle dove and the pigeon and the heifer into pieces and divide them like a middle isle.

And at the right time we will each pass through them. And theologians call this the oath of malfeasance. It's a promise where you are saying, if I break the conditions of this covenant relationship, may I become like these animals cut in half, destroyed, broken, may I be cursed.

[16 : 32] And remember in Genesis 15, when it comes time for the relationship to be established, God puts Abraham to sleep and he passes between the pieces twice.

And God is, what is God is saying in Hesed love, I know what you are Abraham. I know that you're a sinner. I know that you cannot fulfill the conditions of this covenant and I'm passing through for me and for you.

God is saying I will curse myself. If Abraham breaks the covenant, then may I be cursed on behalf of Abraham. That is the beginning, the historical moment where Hesed love erupts into human history.

And then in the David story, how can he do this? And it's not because David was just trying to be a nice guy. That's not the resource here. The resource is that David had seen, remember what David had seen.

David had seen the true king of Israel, the bloodline king, Jonathan, stripped of his royalty saying, David, I will give up my kingship to the point of death because I want to call you brother.

[17 : 47] David had seen in his life what it looks like for the son of the king to humiliate himself by stripping himself of his royalty to the point of death.

And David is not the first shadow of the true king and of the gospel in this story. The only reason that David can show this type of love is because he had seen a glimpse, an image, a shadow of what it would look like one day for the son to be stripped, to be stripped naked and put upon, lifted up in royalty upon the cross, giving up his divine right of exaltation and ultimate humiliation because he said, I want to covenant with you as brother forever.

And that is where David got the power to love like this. Now, let's ask how we can get the power to love like this.

By seeing the second thing, the mercy of the king, secondly and finally, we'll look at the rest of the story more closely. So far we have covered verse one.

And so now we're going to verse two, but we will not treat every verse like that. We will knock the rest out all in this second point. The rest of the passage is about how David loves and it's about the mercy of the king.

[19 : 15] King David wants to give a gift, right? He wants to give has had love, kindness, and he wants to give it for Jonathan's sake, but who does he want to give it to? That's the question here.

And the answer we're told is a man named Mophibosheth. And in the ancient Near East, it's very important to note that in the ancient Near East, a man's, their CV is in some ways more important than for us today.

You know, today, if you want to get a job in the 21st century, you need a CV that's got marketable skills that you can be hired for the job that you're chasing after.

In the ancient Near East, there was also a version of this, a CV that you had to have put together to succeed. But it wasn't anything like ours. It was based on blood lineage, who your father, who your grandfather was, the amount of land, that you inherited.

If any of those things were out of place, then it was probably going to be the case that you lived a life of utter poverty. And just notice in the text in 2 Samuel 9, the CV of Mophibosheth, his name.

[20 : 28] Names are so important in the Hebrew Bible, in ancient Near East. Mophibosheth, the core of his name is Ibo-sheh, which means in Hebrew, shame. And a lot of the commentators will say that Mophibosheth means out of the house of shame, or from the mouth of shame.

So his name is shame, his public name is shame. His bloodline, he's the grandson of Saul, son of Jonathan, the disgraced lineage, the cursed lineage in the book of 2 Samuel.

And the place, it says here that he lives in a place called Lo Debar. And Lo Debar in Hebrew literally means nowhere. Debar means nowhere, and Lo means nothing.

And so a lot of people will say that he comes from Nowhereville, and his name is out of the mouth of shame, and he is of the disgraced lineage of the cursed king.

And when you come to the description of who he is, it says twice, in fact. It highlights this at the beginning and end that he's disabled, that both of his feet have been disabled. And in the ancient Near East, having a disability was an incredibly, incredibly difficult thing.

[21 : 43] It typically meant that you would be homeless and poor for your entire life, that the disabled were not taken care of in ways that we would expect.

And so it's very likely actually, because it says he lives in the house of Makir, who was a David supporter, that he's a slave in the house of Makir.

And he's disabled, he cannot walk in both of his feet. The way that happened actually was in 2 Samuel 4, he became disabled because he was running from David's army.

When David's army came to kill David's enemies. And in 2 Samuel 4, the nurse, when he was only a small child, took him up to run from the army and fell on him and broke both of his legs.

And he never recovered from that. Even more than all of that. That's his CV. But even more, in verse 6, you'll see it.

[22 : 43] When he gets to David, it says that he falls on his face prostrate before David. And David has to turn to him and say, fear not. And there's a specific reason for that.

The reason is that Mephibosheth knows exactly what this moment is. Mephibosheth comes in, and as one commentator puts it, when a new regime or a dynasty comes to power in the ancient world, the name of the game is Purge.

You needn't go wandering into the ancient Near East to confirm this. You can stay within the pages of biblical history and watch Ba'ashah in 1 Kings 15, 1 Kings 16, Jehu 2 Kings 10 to find out what happens to the remnants of the previous king.

The new king always needs to solidify his position. It was conventional political policy, solidification by liquidation.

Everybody in the former regime must die. Everybody knew it. Every country practiced it. Everybody believed in it. And so when Mephibosheth, the only blood lineage of King Saul, comes before David, he knows what's going to happen.

[23 : 58] Because in the ancient Near East, the king holds two offices. Unlike today, a king in the ancient world is both the ruler of the land and also holds the office of judge.

He is the supreme court of the land. His word is final. He issues the sentences and the punishments. And so he knows that he's standing before the judge himself, and he knows as an enemy of the state that he is before the judge in order to be judged.

He is going to be judged by the judge. And that's why people in this moment say that this is David, King David, the type of the true king at his best, at his climax.

Because the judge himself to the one who everybody expects to be ultimately judged, finally judged, cursed unto death Mephibosheth, the man whose name is shame, who comes from Nowhereville, who is an enemy of the state, who is a slave, who cannot walk in a place where that is incredibly difficult.

David, at the point where Mephibosheth is waiting for the sword upon his neck, feels the hand of the king upon his shoulder. And David says, fear not, you were once my enemy and now you are my son.

[25 : 21] And he says, every day from here out, you will eat at the king's table. And this is the word of the gospel.

This is the hasted love that's been woven into the whole of sacred history by God the Father pointing forward to the king himself who would come down and strip himself of his royalty like Jonathan.

But like David, he would stand up and he would put his hand upon your shoulder and he would say your name and he would say, you were once my enemy and now I call you son.

I call you daughter. And from here out, you will eat at my table. You will eat at the table of the king. Because God has been preaching this gospel to us from thousands of years before Jesus Christ would ever enter the world.

And this is the good news of the Old Testament that screams to us. Believe the love of God in the gospel of the New Covenant, of the true king of Jesus Christ, where the true king says your name and says, take and eat.

[26 : 32] You can come to my table for the rest of your days. The power to love like God loves, which God says to us in the Bible is possible to have friendship like this and to have family relationships like this and to have church covenant community like this and to have a relationship with God like this that it is possible, but it's not from the recent.

We don't look deep within and we don't go and try to build up the courage and build up the ability. It comes from having experienced one who would be stripped and exalted unto death for me, for you, for us.

It comes from the, this is an invitation to know the the hessed love of King Jesus for you that came in the middle of human history.

While we were enemies of God, he came to us in Jesus Christ and offered us the food of his table. Now, we'll close with this.

This has been pointed out before I first heard Derek Thomas mention this some years ago and commentators will point this out. But if you, as we close, if you just, if you think about this story and who was at the table that Mephibosheth would come to every single week, every single day, you know, David said, you will eat at my table, you will have an inheritance and you will come and dine with me.

[28 : 02] Who was at David's table? Who ate at David's table day in and day out? And if you, if you search through the books of Samuel, you can put it together.

The ones that we know about are Amnon, who was David's true eldest son, who was named a mighty man of valor. He was a Hercules in figure in David's world.

And the other is Tamar. And if you've read through the books of Samuel, you'll know that it says of Tamar that she was the most beautiful woman in all of Israel.

And who else? Absalom, his other son. And it says that there was not a blemish on Absalom from the crown of his head to the bottom of his feet.

And Joab, the captain of David's army, who was the leader of David's mighty man, the bravest, the strongest, the best warrior, and lastly Solomon, the future king of Israel, who would become the wisest and wealthiest man in the whole world.

[29 : 11] Just imagine it, you know, every single day someone would have to carry Mephibosheth to the table of King David and the most beautiful people in the world and the strongest and the mightiest and the wisest in all of history, perhaps, were there and every single one of them would have said, there's Mephibosheth, the man who was once called shame from nowhere, who was an enemy of the king, and now he is a son.

He is a brother. He is one of us. And that is the gospel message for every single one of us who would come to faith and believe on Jesus Christ.

Whether you've done that for 50 and 70 and 80 years or this may be day one and you're searching for hope, this is an invitation today on this Sabbath renewal covenant day to believe again that Jesus Christ has come for you and said, come and eat at my table and love in the ways that I love because what you once were, you are no longer in Jesus Christ.

So come today and rest in his mercy. Let's pray together. Father, we give thanks for your gospel and we give thanks for how you have woven all of history together so that we can see the beauty of the gospel in the David story.

And so we ask today that you would wake us up to know our status before you, that we are enemies apart from Jesus, but that in Christ we are sons and daughters.

[30 : 49] And so we rest today in that fact of history, the fact of the death and resurrection of the Son. And we long and ask today that you would make us people so shaped by this gospel with that we would love in surprising ways, love that comes from the power of the Holy Spirit alone that we cannot get from our own resources.

And so we ask for this heart and these hopes, Lord, this morning for each of us and as a community in Christ's name, we ask it. Amen.