

The King's Grace

In 1943 during World War 2, an American pilot named Charlie Brown (his real name) was given a mission to bomb a factory in Germany. His plane, a B-17 had taken a huge amount of hits, tail section shredded, one prop not working, smashed nose, holes everywhere. Three of the men on board were wounded. Worse, the compass had stopped working, and they were actually flying deeper into German territory. A German pilot named Franz Stigler was sent up to shoot down this plane. But when he got up there, he couldn't believe the state of their plane. He had simply never seen a plane in such bad condition. He didn't have the heart to shoot down a plane that was already so dilapidated. Instead, he signalled to them to turn around, and to follow him. He escorted them all the way to the North Sea where they could find their way home, and then returned to Germany, telling his commanding officer that he'd shot them down. It was forty-six years later that Stigler and Brown met, and that amazing act became public knowledge. The word for not giving your enemies what they do deserve, and giving them what they don't deserve is *grace*.

Grace is all over the Bible, it is not only in the New Testament. From cover to cover, the Bible reveals a God who gives His enemies what they don't deserve, and withholds what they do deserve. In fact, when God reveals Himself and proclaims Himself to Moses, the very first word He uses to explain who He is in Exodus 34 is: gracious. He is just, He is powerful, He is infinite. But as He deals with us, He is gracious.

Grace is not only taught in the words and works of Jesus and in the letters of Paul, it is also illustrated for us in the histories in the Bible, like the one before us. This might seem like a strange chapter to include in the Bible. Why, in the middle of all these descriptions of David's wars, and the expansion of the kingdom, do we have this chapter about David's dealings with a disabled man? The answer is that this chapter shows that the man after God's own heart was not only strong and just, he was also gracious and merciful. David is an illustration of the ultimate king: Messiah. He illustrates not only Messiah's ability to conquer His enemies with power and might, but Messiah's ability to conquer His enemies by love. God is both great and good, just and merciful, powerful and gracious.

David is a king at the zenith of his power. He has conquered and crippled Israel's enemies on the west, east, north, and south. He has organised his kingdom into military and priestly and diplomatic and administrative functions. When you have this kind of stability and success and prosperity, it can either be used for enormous good, or for enormous evil. In chapter 11, we'll see how this prosperity led to enormous evil in David's life, evil that undid his gains and ruined much of what could have been. But here in chapter 9, we'll see how David used this prosperity for great good, and in doing so, became one of the greatest illustrations of grace. As this chapter unfolds, look out for three amazing acts of grace by the king: a gracious call, a gracious kindness and a gracious commitment.

I. The King's Gracious Call

This is around 997 B. C., about 15 years into David's reign. The more David finds his kingdom established, the more likely he is to remember those days when his life was the opposite: on the run, hunted, persecuted. He remembers the great injustices and griefs that Saul brought to him: the ongoing hunt for his life, the slander, the injustice. Saul robbed him of his home, his job, his reputation, his stability, and even his wife. Even when he promised to stop hunting David, Saul would go right back to it. David no doubt remembers that. Saul has been dead for 13 years, David has been king first of Judah and then of all Israel since then.

He also remembers the awful tearing in his heart, because his very best friend in the world was Saul's son, Jonathan. There was no one closer to him, no one he trusted more, or enjoyed more. David, now on the throne, probably remembers that his now-dead friend had once imagined David on the throne with himself, Jonathan, at his side. David would have wished it so. On two recorded occasions, David and Jonathan made a covenant, that if either of them died, they would take care of the other one's family. ¹⁴ "And you shall not only show me the kindness of the LORD while I still live, that I may not die ¹⁵ "but you shall not cut off your kindness from my house forever, no, not when the LORD has cut off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth." (1 Sam. 20:14-15)

Now, you might remember, after Saul and Jonathan were killed by the Philistines, most of Saul's family was killed in the ensuing years in the civil war between David's general Joab, and Saul's general Abner. In the ancient world, kingship passed down through families. You didn't get a different king by vote. It was only if one king was overthrown, or assassinated, that another royal family altogether would take over. If one king deposed another, the new king would often wipe out any family members of the former king to prevent rivals and rebellions. In fact, many years later, David would give Solomon a list of people who had earned the death penalty for their treachery, and were a threat to Solomon's throne.

But David had not hunted down every relative of Saul. In fact, David had the chance to kill Saul himself on two occasions, but did not. But now that David has dealt with foreign enemies to Israel, perhaps he will now deal with local, domestic enemies to his throne.

But David chooses something else. He chooses to make a gracious call.

2 Samuel 9:1 Now David said, "Is there still anyone who is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?"

David chooses to show kindness to anyone alive who is related to Jonathan, for Jonathan's sake. He does not know who has survived the civil war, maybe there is no one at all. But he remembers his friend, and remembers the covenant they made. And even though Jonathan is not with him to hold him to it, the love in that covenant binds David's heart. For the sake of his friend, for the sake of the covenant he swore, he extends a call to anyone from Saul's house to come to him.

Now you can bet that once David (the one-time enemy of Saul) was on the throne, and started asking questions about surviving members of Saul's house, suddenly no one in Israel was a relative of Saul, or worked for Saul, or had even ever known Saul. So I picture David having to do some research, some asking, and re-assuring that he means no harm, before he is finally able to locate this man named Ziba.

² And *there was* a servant of the house of Saul whose name was Ziba. So when they had called him to David, the king said to him, "Are you Ziba?" And he said, "At your service!"

Ziba was one of Saul's former employees, but he turns out to be a fairly wealthy man himself.

¹⁰ Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.

For some reason, Ziba knows where the scattered descendants of Saul may still be. I imagine him coming to the palace with some fear, wondering if David was going to finally enact a revenge purge. And when David asks if there are still relatives of Saul or Jonathan, his worst fears must have been realised, until David added those words.

³ Then the king said, "Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, to whom I may show the kindness of God?"

Hesed Elohim. The kindness of God. This is a hugely important word, used 255 times in the Hebrew Bible. It is often translated *lovingkindness*, sometimes it is translated *mercy*, sometimes it is translated *steadfast love*. It is the idea of kind and faithful benevolence. But it is usually love contained within a loyal agreement or covenant, like a marriage, or like a special treaty. This is love that loves you, not because of how good you are, but often enough, in spite of how bad you are. It is a love that will keep on loving though you have given enough reasons to stop loving.

And Ziba said to the king, "There is still a son of Jonathan *who is* lame in *his* feet."

Ziba doesn't even name this son; he just tells David that there is a man who cannot walk who is Jonathan's son, and he is still alive. That sounds unusual, and we actually read of how this happened to him in 2 Samuel 4:4

⁴ Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son *who was* lame in *his* feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel; and his nurse took him up and fled. And it happened, as she made haste to flee, that he fell and became lame. His name *was* Mephibosheth. (2 Sam. 4:4)

Interestingly, he wasn't always named Mephibosheth. First Chronicles 8:34 tells us that his name was originally Meribaal, which means Baal is my advocate. He then is renamed to Mepivoshet, which means *exterminating the idol; dispelling the shame*. It has been about fifteen years or more since the day he was dropped. He is around 21 years old. He has his own family, verse 12 tells us he already had his own son: ¹² Mephibosheth had a young son whose name *was* Micha. (2 Sam. 9:12)

Perhaps Ziba is telling David that Mephibosheth is lame so as to say he is no threat to David, and David should leave him alone. He may also mean that he was without ability to stand in the king's presence – for that is a pre-requisite. No one slouches, reclines, or sits in the presence of the king. From one point of view, he isn't really worth David's time. He's harmless, helpless and won't add much value to the king's court.

⁴ So the king said to him, "Where *is* he?" And Ziba said to the king, "Indeed he *is* in the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, in Lo Debar."

Apparently a man by the name of Machir had sheltered Mephibosheth and his household. We don't know exactly where Lo-Debar was, it may have been a town about 16 kilometres south of the Lake of Galilee, so a good 100 kilometres away. Mephibosheth, who was really a prince in Israel, the son of Jonathan, son of Saul, was dispossessed, a man who had lost his lands, lost his royal inheritance, lost his ability to walk and defend himself. He was basically living in hiding, living off someone's charity. But with all this being true, David extends a gracious call.

⁵ Then King David sent and brought him out of the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, from Lo Debar.

Think about all these things about David's call to Mephibosheth. It is a call of grace. David did not call Mephibosheth because he felt desperately sorry for him. He called Mephibosheth to honour his covenant with his father Jonathan. It was grace that Mephibosheth was a recipient of a covenant made before he was born.

David did not call Mephibosheth because Mephibosheth had sent him requests for aid and assistance. This was entirely David's initiative. It was grace that made David look for the descendants of his enemy to help.

David did not send Mephibosheth an invitation and see if he would come on his own. He sent and fetched him. Mephibosheth would have been totally unable to make it to David's court by himself. He needed assistance. It was grace that brought him.

Here is a glorious illustration of God's call to you and me for salvation.

Just like David, God calls us not because there is something in us worthy of the call. We won't bring any benefit to God. God does pity us, but the real reason God loves us is also because of a covenant. We read in Psalm 2 of a covenant the Father made with the Son to give Him the nations for His inheritance. God the Father loves us for Christ's sake. God the Son loves us for His Father's sake. That's good news. If God loved us only for our sake, it would be like Mephibosheth insisting that David love him not for Jonathan's sake, but for his own. But David loved Mephibosheth for Jonathan's sake, and so God loves us because of His own covenant in Himself.

Just like David, God calls us, when we were not calling upon Him. ¹¹ There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. (Rom. 3:11).

⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), (Eph. 2:4-5)

God was not waiting to hear from us to see if we wanted to be called. He calls while we are going astray, while we are faced away from him.

Just like David, God calls us when we were without strength to come to God,

⁶ For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:6-8)

The gracious call. But David did not only call with grace. He went beyond that.

II. The King's Gracious Kindness

⁶ Now when Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, had come to David, he fell on his face and prostrated himself. Then David said, "Mephibosheth?" And he answered, "Here is your servant!"

Mephibosheth is brought in, undoubtedly carried in. He has no idea what is in David's heart. He is likely expecting David to carry out the tradition and execute him that very day. He is carried into David's throne-room, almost certainly fearing for his life. He falls on his face, which would be very difficult for a lame man. He is seeking to show David he is no threat to his kingdom. He is seeking mercy.

Mephibosheth hears only one word – David saying his name. Mephibosheth cries out: Here is your servant. I am not your enemy, but your servant! I am submitted, I am loyal, I am not your rival.

But think about how Mephibosheth could all at once have been hated by David or loved by him. David could hate him. Mephibosheth is actually a legal claimant to the throne. He is a rival. He is the grandchild of Saul. He represents that royal family that did its utmost to destroy David without mercy. And now that Mephibosheth is present, it is clear he will not in any way benefit to David's court – he is a lame man who would need to be cared for perpetually – a drain on David's money and resources. He would never be able to earn his keep at David's house, never provide any services to David, never become a soldier or a bodyguard, or a wise counselor.

On the other hand, this is the son of his best friend. In better times, Mephibosheth would have grown up playing with David's sons, and probably calling David 'uncle'. Everything David does to and for Mephibosheth is as if he is doing it for his best friend Jonathan.

Which does David choose?

⁷ So David said to him, "Do not fear, for I will surely show you kindness for Jonathan your father's sake, and will restore to you all the land of Saul your grandfather;

Listen to David's words – "Fear not". David calls on the whimpering Mephibosheth to lift up his eyes to see a kind face, a gentle countenance that has good in his heart, not evil. David, in essence forgives Saul's sins against him.

David effectively says "I am not only going to spare your life, but give you what is mine, and invite you to an honoured seat at my table, and give you the land that belongs to me." I will show you *hesed*. What will that look like? David is going to give Mephibosheth everything his grandfather Saul lost through his sin. He is going to restore the forfeited inheritance, and give Mephibosheth back his land. It will be as if he is a prince again.

Why will I do this *hesed* – this unearned, undeserved kindness? For your father Jonathan's sake.

We find ourselves in exactly the same dual relationship before God. God has enough reason to regard us as enemies. We are part of a rebellion against God, despising His goodness. Jesus said there are only two families in the world: God's family and the devil's family, and before we are reconciled, saved, born again, we are in the devil's family. God looks at us and sees reason enough to destroy.

among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

The Bible says we were enemies, it says we were dead to God's goodness, it says we were by nature children of wrath, provoking God's justice to destroy us.

But just like Mephibosheth, God can also look at us through different eyes, and see us as objects of love. For His own sake, for the sake of the covenant within the Trinity, the plan before all ages, God lavishes kindness on the undeserving. When Scripture speaks of God's choice before the foundation of the world, names written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, we are reading about God's oath within Himself. And that is huge cause for rejoicing, because if God is determined to love you in spite of you, nothing you do can make Him love you more, and nothing you do can make Him love you less.

What did He do? When He had every reason to hate us, He loved us, and sought our good. God sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross, so He could forgive us as David forgave the acts of Saul. God did this not when we were fit and impressive, but when, like Mephibosheth, we were lame, helpless, unimpressive.

⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), (Eph. 2:4-5)

And just as David restored the inheritance that Saul lost through sin, the Bible tells us that Christ restores the inheritance that we lost in our father Adam.

¹¹ In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, ... ¹² that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. (Eph. 1:11-12)

Where he displays his healing power

*Death and the curse are known no more;
In him the tribes of Adam boast
More blessings than their father lost.*

And just like Mephibosheth, there is only one thing we can do: humbly receive this grace! We cannot earn it, win it, merit it, deserve it, or pay it back. Mephibosheth says two things in this passage, and both are simple statements of total humility and submission.

And he answered, "Here is your servant!" (2 Sam. 9:6)

⁸ Then he bowed himself, and said, "What *is* your servant, that you should look upon such a dead dog as I?" (2 Sam. 9:8)

There is only one thing Mephibosheth is doing. He is not rejecting. He is not refusing out of pride. He is not maintaining the hostility of his grandfather Saul. He is surrendering his pride, laying down his arms, and accepting the free gift.

That's the only requirement to receive God's grace of an inheritance in Christ. Lay down your arms. Stop fighting. Stop maintaining the independence of our father Adam, or the enmity of the devil. Change sides. Accept your true state as a broken, lame sinner. Admit your need. Receive the grace of the king! Bow the knee, and say, "Behold your servant!"

But David's grace went beyond a gracious call and gracious kindness.

III. The King's Gracious Commitment

and you shall eat bread at my table continually." (2 Sam. 9:7)

⁹ And the king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said to him, "I have given to your master's son all that belonged to Saul and to all his house. ¹⁰ "You therefore, and your sons and your servants, shall work the land for him, and you shall bring in *the harvest*, that your master's son may have food to eat. But Mephibosheth your master's son shall eat bread at my table always." ¹¹ Then Ziba said to the king, "According to all that my lord the king has commanded his servant, so will your servant do." "As for Mephibosheth," *said the king*, "he shall eat at my table like one of the king's sons."

¹² Mephibosheth had a young son whose name was Micha. And all who dwelt in the house of Ziba were servants of Mephibosheth. ¹³ So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem, for he ate continually at the king's table. And he was lame in both his feet. (2 Sam. 9:1-13)

David did more than show temporary kindness to Mephibosheth. David made a commitment. He restored the inheritance to Mephibosheth. But of course, Mephibosheth was lame and couldn't work the land, and his son Micha would have been just a young child. So David charges Ziba to take care of and farm Mephibosheth's lands so that his son will now have an inheritance that will be secure. This will be land that will be worth something, and it will become the wealth and sustenance of the children and grandchildren of Mephibosheth. David is committing to the long-term future and inheritance of Mephibosheth.

But as for Mephibosheth himself, David essentially adopted Mephibosheth as his own son. His commitment to Mephibosheth was to eat and drink what David himself would eat and drink. Three times in this passage, we are told emphatically that Mephibosheth was not just an occasional guest at David's table, but a member of the household.

and you shall eat bread at my table **continually**.

¹⁰ But Mephibosheth your master's son shall eat bread at my table **always**."

¹³ So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem, for he ate **continually** at the king's table

Mephibosheth had all the rights that the princes, the sons of David had. He had everyday access to king David. He could have continual fellowship with the king, and eat at his table. David was lavishing on Mephibosheth all the love and friendship he'd had for Jonathan, and undertaking to take care of him for his entire life. This is a permanent arrangement: a long-term, secure, unchanging commitment.

If you can imagine the table of David a few years later. There is 20 year-old Amnon, impressive, looking more like his father every day. There is beautiful Tamar, nineteen years old, her beauty already enchanting. There is dashing young Absalom, eighteen and perpetually stroking his hair. And there is nine-year old Solomon, his head immersed in a scroll. And then comes the clump, clump, clump sound, and here comes Mephibosheth on crutches, making his way with difficulty to the table. And all David's household watches and then look at David, as David, with a friendly and happy face, welcomes Mephibosheth once again, like a family member, to his table.

Not only does God call us when we are unworthy, not only is He kind to us in forgiving us and giving us an inheritance in Christ, but the Bible tells us that God also adopts us as His own, and undertakes to keep us our entire lives.

⁵ having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, (Eph. 1:5)

God gives us the status of firstborn sons. There's only one firstborn in heaven: the Second Eternal Person of the Trinity. God grants us to be treated like the firstborn, and then in Romans 8 gives us an unbroken chain that extends from eternity past into eternity future:

²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰ Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Rom. 8:29-30)

And there, amongst the glories of Michael and Gabriel, and principalities and powers, come believers: clump, clump, clump. Children of Adam, broken, but now forgiven, cleansed, and seated with Christ in the heavenly places. How long will they be there? Ephesians tells us: they are sealed unto the day of redemption. Kept by the power of God who is able to keep us from falling, to an inheritance incorruptible undefiled, and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.

I don't think anyone here would have a problem with accepting a free gift. Anyone can do that. The human race like things for free. We have a problem admitting that we are in Mephibosheth's position: lame, unable to help ourselves, rightful enemies of God. But recognising the truth of that is when you really understand the gospel: God wants to bless you in His Son, if you will lay down your arms, accept your true state, and receive the free gift of forgiveness in Christ.