

Scripture: 2 Samuel 9:1-13  
Message: Keeping Promises; Showing Kindness  
October 22, 2017; Bethel CRC, Brockville, ON  
Pastor Jack Van de Hoef

This month is the celebration of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. One of the themes of renewal that came out of the Reformation was the importance of the Word of God as the revelation and authority of God in our lives. For Martin Luther, it was important that the people in the pew have access to the Bible and not limit that access to only the clergy.

When we read the Bible, there are different ways to interpret it. One approach is to find moral truths that the stories bring out. This can also lead to proof-texting, finding a text to prove a moral truth. The story from 2 Samuel 9 could teach us to care for those who are physically disabled. See how David took care of Mephibosheth. Or we could say that this story teaches us to love our enemies. See how David took care of Saul's grandson, even though Saul had been an enemy. Those truths are valid and right. It is important to do those things and the Bible does teach that. But is that the purpose of this particular story?

When we read the Bible in the context of God's Grand Story, we will come to a different perspective. God's Grand Story in Scripture tells us the story of creation, the fall into sin, the redeeming of the fallen world by God and the eventual final victory over sin. As we read this story about David and Mephibosheth, it is not about finding moralistic lessons, but seeing how it is part of expressing the plan of God to restore the world to its original intent.

The previous chapter gives us an overview of the battles which David fought to defeat the enemies on the north, south, east and west. In other words, David established peace all around the nation of Israel. He subdued those who would attack God's chosen people. In that way he was expressing God's intended rule over the enemies of the kingdom of God. He was establishing 'rest' for God's people. He was pointing to the rest we can enjoy now, anticipating the eternal victory and rest which God intends for his people.

We then read a summary verse in chapter 8:15, "David reigned over all Israel, doing what was just and right for all his people." David is a "man after God's own heart." David is a type pointing to Jesus Christ, who would defeat the enemy and do what is just and right.

Following this overview of David as king, the story continues by telling us of more specific events in David's life. In these specific stories, we can see what "doing what is just and right" looks like. The first story begins with David asking, "Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?"

To understand this question, we have to go back to David's friendship which he had with King Saul's son, Jonathan. David remembered the promise which he made when he was afraid of Saul's anger and Jonathan promised to protect David (see 1 Samuel 20:13-17). In their conversation, Jonathan said, "May the LORD be with you as he has been with my father. But

show me unfailing kindness like that of the LORD as long as I live...and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family--not even when the LORD has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth."

When David realized that he had to flee from Saul's hatred, Jonathan said to David (v.42), "Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the LORD, saying, 'The LORD is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever.'"

"Show me unfailing kindness....do not ever cut off your kindness from my family." "Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" And again in verse 3, David refers to "God's kindness," recalling that phrase spoken by Jonathan, "kindness like that of the Lord."

God's kindness is expressed in his provision for the needs of his people: "He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy" (Acts 14:17).

God's kindness leads toward repentance: "Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?" (Romans 2:4).

We read in Titus 3:4-5, "But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy."

These are New Testament references to God's kindness. But they show us the heart of God, his provision, his mercy restoring relationships, which directs us to how we also show that kindness.

David desired to show this kindness to someone from Saul's family. As the ruling king, it was actually expected that David would eliminate any possible threat to his authority. It was common for a new king to kill every member of the previous king's family. That way, no one would try to take the throne back. But David is determined to show kindness. It is a kindness that expresses mercy and acceptance of the other person.

A servant of Saul's household, now serving David, reports (v.3b), "There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in both feet."

If we go back to 2 Samuel 4:4 we find out what happened. "Jonathan son of Saul had a son who was lame in both feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan (that they were killed in battle) came from Jezreel. His nurse picked him up and fled, but as she hurried to leave, he fell and became crippled. His name was Mephibosheth."

Mephibosheth is identified in verse 6 as the "son of Jonathan, son of Saul." This is very intentional to show that he is actually the rightful heir to the throne of his grandfather Saul. Mephibosheth may have been quite frightened to be summoned to the presence of David. He knew how others in his family had been killed. When he sees David, he bowed down to pay him

honour. This would have been difficult for someone crippled in both legs. Yet he wants David to have a clear understanding of his respect.

David makes it clear that there is no need to be afraid. He immediately explains his purpose: "I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan" (v.7). Again, the promise of showing kindness is mentioned.

There are two expressions of this kindness. One is to return Saul's property to Mephibosheth. As the new king, David would have been given the property of the defeated, former king. Now he restores it to Saul's family. There would have been a risk involved. Returning the property and land to the heir to the throne could be understood as giving that family a legitimate place, even giving them the resources to try to take the throne back. But David does not seem to be concerned about that. He is more concerned about showing kindness to Jonathan's son.

The second expression of kindness is to welcome Mephibosheth to eat at the king's table. In this way Mephibosheth would never have any needs, for David would always provide for him. The last verse mentions his place at the king's table along with his being crippled. It would be difficult for a cripple to provide for himself. He would most likely have to resort to begging. But Mephibosheth has nothing to fear. David provides for his needs.

There is some suggestion that David was also being a shrewd king. It is possible that David had an ulterior motive to bring Mephibosheth to the palace. If Saul's grandson was in David's presence, David could keep a closer eye on his activities. If he remained out in the other side of the Jordan, those friendly to Saul could rally together and use Mephibosheth as their front for an attack on David. Having him at the palace kept Mephibosheth away from any possible scheming.

That is a possible motive. But we must also see the clear emphasis on David's desire to show kindness.

His desire. Was it his obligation? Only as we see keeping promises as an obligation. Keeping promises is an expression of faithfulness, which is an attribute of God. David was a man after God's own heart. He desired to honour the Lord, who was his God. That included keeping promises. That included showing kindness.

In God's Grand Story, the Lord reveals to us the nature of the king who rules his kingdom. The king is one who keeps promises and shows kindness. Did David do that in a perfect way? Not always. Does he direct us to the coming King who keeps every promise and shows perfect kindness?

Yes, certainly! Jesus, our faithful King, showing us perfect kindness in offering himself on the cross to pay for our sins. Showing kindness in not treating us as our sins deserve.

God's Grand Story tells us of the rule of this king.

Ephesians 2:6-9: "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly

realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast." God has shown his kindness and mercy to us.

We express this rule of God and extend his kingdom as we express the kindness of God. We have made promises to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbour as ourselves. When we make the promise to follow Jesus, we are promising to become like Christ in showing kindness and mercy.

Colossians 3:12: "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."

To whom will you show this kindness? It starts with those who are closest to us, our family and friends. Our words and actions show a kindness and respect. We treat each other with kindness.

To be like Christ, we show kindness to those we may disagree with. We do not cut them down or ridicule them. We have a conversation with respect, even if we do not agree. We talk about others with respect.

To be like Christ, we show kindness to those who are different from us. They may choose to dress differently, even covering their faces. That is no reason not to show kindness, and in so doing, to share God's kindness.

To be like Christ, we show kindness to those who make different lifestyle choices. We may not agree or even understand their decisions, but we listen to their story with kindness and share God's kindness with them.

2 Peter 1:5-7: "For this very reason, (because of God's kindness, mercy and provision) make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love."

This is not an obligation as Christians. This is the wonderful freedom of living under the kindness of the king, till he comes again. Amen.