**David shows kindness** 7/5/23 dkm

Read: 2Samuel 9, 10

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Psalms: 50:1-7, 25:8-15, 78:1-11, 117

David proved to be a great warrior following his battle with Goliath. As a commander in Saul’s army, he fought against and defeated the enemies of Israel. He learned military strategies while on the run from Saul. When he became king, he led the army against pagan nations on all sides, defeating them and extending the borders of Israel. David ‘shed much blood on the earth’, according to the word of the Lord (1Chron 22:8). But David did not shed innocent blood, or kill anyone in personal revenge. As king, David was not a malevolent dictator like most of his contemporaries, nor was he a benevolent bully. Benevolent bullies are kind whenever you bow down to them but curse you if you do not bow down to them. Such men can be found in all sections of our society, even in the church.

David led an exemplary life before he became king, and even after he was crowned king of Israel. We have learned a lot of wisdom in our study of David’s life, things like patience and refusing to take revenge, like consulting the Lord before making decisions and committing our ways to the Lord. David was also a man who kept his promises. A king or political leader who keeps his promises is hard to find in our day. In fact, it is hard to find such a person in any section of our society. Thousands break their marriage vows without any senses of guilt. They suffer financial and relationship consequences but fail to consider these at the time. Having a conscience concerned about breaking promises is a great blessing.

David was a man after God’s own heart. David did not make promises lightly and he did not break promises lightly. You will recall the solemn covenant he made with his friend Jonathan (1Sam 18:3, 20:15, 42). David vowed not to cut off the descendants of Jonathan while he was king. It was common in those days for kings to kill any male who threatened their throne; sons of previous kings always posed a threat. Saul’s son, Jonathan, was killed in the same battle as his father (1Sam 31). Under his covenant with David he posed no threat to David anyway. Another son, Ishbosheth, ruled briefly in Saul’s place but was assassinated by two wicked men, whom David had executed for their crime.

With peace in the land and an administration in place, David asked if there was anyone left in the house of Saul (9:1). But his concern was not to cut off any threat to his throne; rather it was to ‘show him kindness for Jonathan’s sake’ (9:1). Our first subheading is, ‘Kindness to Mephibosheth accepted’, our second, ‘Kindness to the son of Nahash rejected’ and our third, ‘Consequences of humiliating David’s envoys’.

**1. Kindness to Mephibosheth accepted**

Why did David ask if there was anyone left in Saul’s house, any descendants of Saul still alive? It was not that he wanted to kill them because he adds, ‘That I may show kindness for Jonathan’s sake’ (9:1). Jonathan was dead, and we might think that was the end of their relationship. Besides, no one else knew about this covenant- except David and the Lord- both men swore ‘in the name of the Lord’ (1Sam 20:42). But this was a long time ago and a lot of water had flowed under the bridge since then. Surely David could not be held to a promise he made all those years ago! Mephibosheth was five years of when Jonathan was killed but he now has his own son Micha (5:4, 9:12).

David was man after God’s own heart and the Lord had kept his promise to David, so David must keep his promise. The Lord takes vows very seriously, and so did David, and so must we. Is it because we take vows lightly that we fail to take hold of God’s promises to us?

Remembering his vow to Jonathan and Saul, David asked if there was anyone left of Saul’s descendants. Ziba, a man who had been a servant to Saul, was called to the palace where King David asked these questions. Again, David made it clear that he wanted to show kindness to any such person, not get rid of them. The word translated ‘kindness’ is the Hebrew word ‘*chesed’* which means steadfast or covenant love. David was acting out of commitment to a covenant he made with Jonathan. Some suggest he was being politically astute in bringing Mephibosheth into the place to keep an eye on him, but a disabled man was hardly a threat to David’s throne anyway.

Ziba told David that a son of Jonathan’s was still alive, but that he was lame in his feet (9:2). We were told back in chapter 4 about Mephibosheth, and how he his nurse fled with him when Saul and Jonathan perished on Mt Gilboa. In her haste, this young five year old boy fell and became lame in his feet; it seems he became a paraplegic. His disability made no difference to David. David asked for Mephibosheth to be brought from the house of Machir in Lo Debar to the house of King David in Jerusalem. Ziba, it seems, was not the one looking after Mephibosheth at this time.

Mephibosheth was understandably afraid when told that King David wanted to see him. When brought to Jerusalem to meet David, Mephibosheth fell on his face saying, ‘Here is your servant’ (9:6). He could not have been more humble, or grovelling as we might say. He fell prostate in fear of what David might do to him. David quickly assured him that he wanted to show him kindness for his father’s sake (9:7). Mephibosheth breathed a great sigh of relief; he could hardly believe what David said.

David promised Mephibosheth three things by way of keeping his promise to Jonathan. Firstly, he told Mephibosheth he had nothing to fear from him but kindness. Secondly, he promised to restore all the land of his grandfather Saul. Saul’s ancestral home was in Gibeah of Benjamin; any lands acquired by him as king would have come under the administration of David. Ziba, as Saul’s servant, was apparently farming Saul’s family farm. Thirdly, Mephibosheth himself would eat at David’s table, not simply as a guest but eat continually (9:7). Fear turned to overwhelming gratitude in the heart of this cripple. Mephibosheth describes himself as a ‘dead dog’, a term of contempt he made have heard others use. Disabled people were probably hidden away in this days, as they still are in many societies. Mephibosheth would no longer be hidden away because of his heritage or became of his disability but would eat at the king’s table.

David is called a ‘type of Christ’ and his response to this cripple reminds us of Jesus responding to the sick and the lame who were brought to him. David did not heal them as Jesus did, but he did show compassion to this lame man called Mephibosheth; he was special of course in that he was the object of covenant love. By birth he was an enemy of David, but David demonstrated amazing grace in calling Mephibosheth to dine at his own table. By birth you are an enemy of God; we are all descendants of Adam and therefore born in sin. ‘But God demonstrates his own love towards us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us’ (Rom 5:8). Jesus calls us to himself when we have no thought of coming into his house. He calls us and makes us his own adopted children; ‘It is by grace we are saved, through faith’ (Rom 8:30, Eph2:8). Mephibosheth ate at the king’s table like one of the king’s sons, and so will if you are an adopted child of God.

David again called Ziba to tell him that he was restoring all of Saul’s land to Mephibosheth, and that Ziba and his family and servants were to work this land for Mephibosheth and bring the harvest to him (9:10). In India land is not bought and sold as it is here. Family members who move to the city still go back to the farm at harvest time to collect their share of the crop. In ancient Israel land also remained in the family, and here we see some of the crop being brought to Mephibosheth as a member, indeed master, of the family, even though he was eating at the king’s table. It is not clear if Mephibosheth’s son Micha ate at the king’s table, but in keeping with David’s covenant promise to Jonathan, he probably did.

**2. Kindness to the son of Nahash rejected**

After showing kindness to Mephibosheth because of the covenant he made with his father Jonathan, David went on to show kindness to Hanun, the son of another of David’s friends. The word translated ‘kindness’ is the same Hebrew word used of Mephibosheth, the word for covenant love. Did David make a covenant with Nahash, the Ammonite king? The Ammonites were descendants of Lot through his daughter but were not included with God’s covenant people. David says that Nahash showed kindness to him, probably during his time running from Saul (10:2). Saul defeated Nahash and his men at the beginning of his reign, so Nahash was no friend of Saul. He did however, show kindness to David, and David wished to repay this kindness when he heard that Nahash had died.

Hanun took over from his father as king of Ammon. This nation, like others, was in subjection to David as king of Israel- although David did not actually fight against Ammon. David sent his condolences to the young Hanun by the hand of some servants. But this young king listened to bad advice from his nobles or princes. They told him that David’s men were spies, sent to spy out the city (10:3). On the basis of this advice, Hanun took David’s men and shaved off half their beards. Men were very proud of their beards in those days, so this was a terrible humiliation for these men and an affront to David.

They then cut off their clothes at the waist, exposing their buttocks, an even worse humiliation (10:4). One commentator reckons this happened before David became established because no one would dare to do such a thing after David took control of the whole region; but this is the point- Hanun was doing a very foolish thing. It didn’t take long before the people of Ammon realised their king had made them a stench in the nostrils of David (10:6). When David heard of what was done to his men he told them to wait in Jericho, which was still a broken down city, until their beards grew back (10:5).

The king of Ammon had broken whatever covenant or treaty his father had made with David. He rejected David’s show of covenant kindness in an outrageous and humiliating manner. There would of course, be covenant consequences as the people of Ammon realised, even if their king didn’t; Hanun is not mentioned after this. The people of Ammon quickly hired mercenaries from Syria and other places, a total of thirty-three thousand men, to help when David came to put town their king’s rebellion.

Sure enough, David sent ‘Joab and all the army of the mighty men’ to deal with the Ammonites (10:7). Joab need all his mighty men because the Ammonites had gathered a huge defence force. None of these people liked David but they were mercenaries- a bit like the Russians fighting in Ukraine today. Joab found himself and his army caught in a pincer movement; the Ammonites were holed up in their fortified city and the mercenaries were out in the country (10:8). Realising he had to fight on two fronts, Joab decided to split his army into two. He told his trusted and able brother, Abishai, to go up against the Ammonites in the city while he went to fight the Syrian mercenaries in the field. The plan was that whichever was having trouble, the other would come to this aid. As Joab assembled his troops he told them to be courageous and strong for the people and for the cities of God. He did not exactly pause to pray, but having done what he could by way of preparation, acknowledged the sovereignty of God in the outcome (10:12).

When Joab and his men drew near for battle against the Syrians, they fled (10:13). Did they simply take fright or did the Lord intervene in some way? We are not told, but seeing the Syrians flee, the Ammonites, who had come out to fight against Abishai and his men, ran back into their city. It was the Ammonites and the Syrians now being humiliated before King David and his army. Joab returned to Jerusalem having successfully dealt with the Ammonites (10:14).

The Syrians did not accept their routing at their hands of David’s men. They regrouped under the leadership of Hadadezer and with more Syrians from ‘beyond the river’. When David heard of this uprising, he led his army across the Jordan and up to a place called Helam where the Syrians had gathered (10:17). David inflicted heavy losses on the Syrian coalition led by Hadadezer. The coalition disbanded, with individual kings accepting David’s terms of peace (10:19)

The Syrians leaned not to be bribed by the Ammonites, and the Ammonites learned not to break their covenant with David. What have we learned? We have learnt to remember covenant promises because the Lord remembers, and will hold us accountable for every word we speak.