

JUSTICE AND KINDNESS

DEVOTIONAL READING: 2 Samuel 9:1-7, 9-12

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 2 Samuel 9

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: 2 Samuel 9:1-7, 9-12

I. A Promise Remembered

2 Samuel 9:1-4

1 And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake?

2 And there was of the house of Saul a servant whose name was Ziba. And when they had called him unto David, the king said unto him, Art thou Ziba? And he said, Thy servant is he.

3 And the king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may shew the kindness of God unto him? And Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet.

4 And the king said unto him, Where is he? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lodebar.

1a. *David* had vowed against destroying Saul's house, both to *Saul* and to *Jonathan*. In spite of potential threats to his rule, David determined to keep his promises and spare the lineage of his friend and his former king.

How could David not know whether anyone of Saul's household still lived? For one thing, he had been busy with wars, establishing Jerusalem as his capital, and trying to move the ark. How was he meant to keep track of who died in those years? But the answer may be even sim-

pler than that: Saul's family was hiding. Knowing that David had been crowned king first in Judah and then over all Israel, any remaining sons of Saul would have to fear that they would be executed to prevent their trying to regain the throne.

1b. Some have said that David's motives here may have involved keeping his enemies close, so as to make sure they did not plot his overthrow. Knowing that people rarely have pure motivations, it is possible that David valued both keeping potential usurpers close *and* scoring points with Saul's supporters. But his main motivation was neither of these things.

David's pledge to *Jonathan* went so far as to ensure continual *kindness* to the same, even after "the Lord hath cut off the enemies of David every one from the face of the earth" (1 Samuel 20:15). It is fitting that after we hear of David's enemies being cut off from the face of the earth, we hear of his determination to find someone to care *for Jonathan's sake*.

This kindness often describes acts of loyalty or trustworthiness within the context of a promise (example: Joshua 2:12). Kindness like this is built into the character of God (see Exodus 34:6; Numbers 14:19).

Covenants were struck in situations where a power imbalance existed. At the time that David and *Jonathan* committed to their own covenant, *Jonathan* was

the heir to Saul's throne and David was a soldier, albeit a very popular one. By the time David was looking for an opportunity to act on this covenant, Jonathan was dead and David himself was king instead. David's adherence to the covenant years later depended solely on his faithfulness toward Jonathan, not to any possible falling out of their friendship.

2. *Ziba* held high position among the servants in Saul's *house* even after Saul's death, demonstrated here by his being the one called into David's presence. He was the manager of Saul's estate at this point and had become wealthy as a result. Ziba would be sure to know all about Saul's remaining descendants.

Referring to himself as *David's servant* identified Ziba as being loyal to David. This was important to establish if Ziba worried that David might take revenge on the house of Saul, despite the king's claim to want to be kind to someone in the family.

3a. David restated his question, now to a man who should have known the answer. Although the question would not be redundant to Ziba, who was hearing it for the first time, the repetition emphasizes for the reader David's urgent desire. The slight difference of showing *the kindness of God* recalls God's favor expressed through and as a result of His covenant with Israel.

3b. The first mention of this *son* comes in a passing note in 2 Samuel 4:4. He was five years old when Saul and *Jonathan* died in battle. At that time, his nurse fled with the boy, likely thinking that David would come to eliminate him. Unfortunately, though, the boy fell during the flight and suffered permanently crippling injuries. As *Ziba* spoke, that child would probably be in his early to mid 20s.

Ziba did not mention the child's name in his reply to David, but seems quick to have mentioned his disability. Maybe he

knew David would immediately know which son Ziba was referring to. Perhaps he sought to reassure David that Jonathan's son was no threat, so that David would not seek to kill him.

4. *Lodebar* was a village east of the Jordan River, in Gilead and associated with the tribe of Gad. It was located much closer to Ishbosheth's political center, Mahanaim, than to David's capital, Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5:5). Although *Machir* had probably been a supporter of Saul originally, we later learn that he supported David and his men during Absalom's revolt (17:24-29). The outcome of David's inquiry here may have changed the man's loyalties.

II. A Promise Fulfilled

2 Samuel 9:5-7, 9-12

5 Then king David sent, and fetched him out of the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, from Lodebar.

6 Now when Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence. And David said, Mephibosheth. And he answered, Behold thy servant!

7 And David said unto him, Fear not: for I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually.

.....
9 Then the king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said unto him, I have given unto thy master's son all that pertained to Saul and to all his house.

10 Thou therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants, shall till the land for him, and thou shalt bring in the fruits, that thy master's son may have food to eat: but Mephibosheth thy master's son shall eat bread always at my table. Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.

11 Then said Ziba unto the king, According to all that my lord the king hath commanded his servant, so shall thy servant do. As for Mephibosheth, said the king, he shall eat at my table, as one of the king's sons.

12 And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Micha. And all that dwelt in the house of Ziba were servants unto Mephibosheth.

5-6. *Mephibosheth* immediately honored *David* and addressed him with the deferential language appropriate when speaking to a king, echoing Ziba's words (2 Samuel 9:2). As a potential rival to the throne—being *son of Jonathan*, who was the firstborn *son of the dead King Saul*—Mephibosheth must have felt the tension in this moment. Accordingly, his first aim was to assure David that he was not a threat to his throne.

7. Given the practice of familial annihilation, Mephibosheth may have expected to receive anything but kindness from David. But *David* immediately offered reassurance to Mephibosheth that he need not fear. David's summons was not a ruse to flush Mephibosheth out of hiding. Instead, David wanted to show him *kindness for his father's sake* in order to keep his covenant with Jonathan.

David's desire to *restore* to Mephibosheth the estate of his father suggests that David had gathered additional information beyond what is stated in these verses. Mephibosheth's living in Lodebar in Machir's house makes clear that he wasn't living on any of Saul's lands. Having the *land* restored cemented that Mephibosheth would receive whatever wealth was to be made from his grandfather's holdings.

Mephibosheth seemed sincerely and humbly grateful for David's kindness to him. Mephibosheth no doubt knew of his father's friendship with David and prob-

ably heard stories of Jonathan's aid to David.

9. David had come to possess Saul's land, whether because of his marriage to Michal or as forfeiture to his throne after the failure of Ishbosheth's brief reign. By returning Saul's property to Jonathan's son, David executed not only kindness but also restorative justice. Perhaps Ziba had taken advantage of Mephibosheth's disabled condition and commandeered Saul's estate for himself. His motives are not analyzed here, but later events suggest this would be in character for the *servant*.

10a. Although *Mephibosheth* would *eat* in David's house, *the land* would provide for the rest of Mephibosheth's family and for the servants supported through their own work.

10b. *Ziba* had apparently grown wealthy as a result of his control over Saul's estate, having *twenty servants* of his own, as well as *fifteen sons*. His work on the land would continue to support his own household as well as Mephibosheth's.

11a. Once again *Ziba* emphasized his loyalty to David, calling himself his *servant* twice. Though he did not protest David's decree, he nonetheless looked for an opportunity to have it annulled. His chance came years later when David fled the palace during Absalom's rebellion.

11b. Whereas Jonathan had "loved [David] as his own soul" (1 Samuel 18:1), now David would care for Jonathan's son as his own son. David's care for *Mephibosheth* yields a more satisfying conclusion to the story of David and Jonathan, which otherwise would have had a disheartening end.

12. Jonathan's grandson *Micha* would carry on the family.

Though one might expect David's sons to have some feelings about Mephibosheth's new role in their family, no hostilities between them are noted here or elsewhere.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

JUSTICE AND KINDNESS

Into the Lesson

Unscramble the following sentences. Cross out any sentiments you disagree with:

- Leads kindness to justice.*
- Surprising is sometimes true justice.*
- Everyone wants not justice.*
- It's never too kind to be late.*
- Justice ignore to possible it's.*

How are kindness and justice connected? David's actions today give us some insight into this question.

Into the Word

Explain the background material for this week's lesson by preparing a 90-second story of the background text beginning with one of these phrases:

- Let me tell you about Saul . . .*
- Let me tell you about Jonathan . . .*
- Let me tell you about Mephibosheth . . .*

Put the statements in the correct biblical order:

- ___ David promised to restore to Mephibosheth all the land that had belonged to his grandfather Saul.

- ___ David promised that Mephibosheth would always eat at his table.
- ___ Ziba, a servant of Saul's household, appeared before the king.
- ___ David summoned Jonathan's son Mephibosheth to appear before him.
- ___ Mephibosheth had Ziba and all his sons as his servants.
- ___ Ziba promised to follow David's orders.
- ___ David asked whether anyone from Jonathan's family line was still living.
- ___ David told Ziba that Mephibosheth would receive everything that had belonged to Saul and his family.
- ___ Ziba told David that Jonathan's son was still alive.

Into Life

List as many examples of victims of injustice as you can.

How could each example of a victim of injustice be remedied by acts of kindness.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Show God's kindness—keep your promises.