

## **David and Mephibosheth**

2 Samuel 4:4; 9:1-13 (Background: 1 Samuel 20:12-17)

Key Themes: Adoption

[Core Gospel Concepts: Identity in Christ, Intimacy with the Father)

### **THE STORY:**

*During the time of King Saul, the Israelites went to battle with the Philistines with whom they had been at war for many years. During the fierce battle, King Saul and his son Jonathan were both killed, and the soldiers of Israel all fled in defeat. When the news of King Saul and Jonathan came to their family, Jonathan's five-year-old son was taken up by his nurse, and they ran away in fear. As she fled, the boy fell and became lame, crippled in both feet. His name was Mephibosheth.*

*Years later, when David was king over Israel and the Lord had established his covenant with him, David said, "Is there anyone left in Saul's house that I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" [He asked this because David and Jonathan had been best friends, and they had promised to show kindness to one another's family as long as either lived.] Ziba, a servant from Saul's house, was called to David and was asked the same question.*

*Ziba answered, "There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in both feet."*

*David asked, "Where is he?" When Ziba told David where he was, David sent for him. When Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, came and fell on his face before David to honor him, David said, "Mephibosheth!"*

*And he answered, "Behold, I am your servant."*

*Then David said, "Don't be afraid, I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan, and I will restore to you all the land of your grandfather Saul, and you shall always eat at my table."*

*Mephibosheth was amazed and said, "Who am I, that you should notice a dead dog like me?"*

*Then David said to Ziba, "Everything that belonged to Saul I have given to Mephibosheth. And you, your sons, and servants shall till the land for him and give him the produce, that your master's grandson may have bread to eat. But Mephibosheth, your master's grandson, shall always eat at my table." Ziba agreed to everything David had said. So he, his fifteen sons, and twenty servants became Mephibosheth's servants.*

*So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem because he always ate at David's table, like one of the king's sons. And he was crippled in both of his feet.*

**Optional Memory Verse:** 2 Samuel 9:7 - *"Then David said, 'Don't be afraid, I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan, and I will restore to you all the land of Saul, and you shall always eat at my table.'"*

**Introduction Question** (discuss with a neighbor)

- **What is the most kind thing someone has ever done for you? Did you deserve that**

kindness? Why did they choose to love you that way?

### Teacher's Transition Statement

Our story today is about a man who deserved nothing, but was given the greatest gift he could ever imagine.

### Learn Story Together (Listening Task)

- As you're committing this story to memory, consider these questions:
  - Who was the only living descendant of Saul? What had happened to him?
  - What did Mephibosheth call himself?

### Basic Outline of Discussion (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **Mephibosheth:** What was he like? What were his problems? How was he living like an orphan? Why was he unworthy to eat at the king's table?
- **David:** What was he like toward Mephibosheth? Why could he have refused to help him? What do we learn from him in this story about God from the father? What does he want from us?
- **Us:** How are we like Mephibosheth? How do we live like orphans?
- **Application:** What needs to change in my life after studying this story? What actions, attitudes, or beliefs?
- **Sharing:** Who needs to hear this story?

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (with some possible responses):

- **What was Mephibosheth's physical problem? How did this affect the rest of his life?**
  - *Mephibosheth was lame from an accident that happened when he was a child.*
  - *Made him an outcast, constantly dependent upon others, not able to make decisions on his own, helpless, hopeless.*
- **What was Mephibosheth's other problem? What happened to his family? How do you think this made him feel? How was Mephibosheth's situation like that of other orphans?**
  - *He was the descendant of Saul, who had been rejected as king by God.*
  - *He was an orphan. His grandfather and father were killed, and he was forced to live in hiding in case another king wanted to take his life.*
  - *He likely lived every day of his life in fear of what could happen to him by someone more powerful than him. He was completely unable to help himself out of his situation.*
  - *Mephibosheth had everything in his life stripped away from him in the matter of a few hours: his position in the royal family, his health, childhood, independence, loved one, friends, even his dignity. He was only five years old when this all happened. This was a true tragedy.*
- **Why does David choose to extend kindness to a member of Saul's house? How had Saul treated David during his life? What does this teach us about David's heart?**
  - *Because of the covenant that he had made with his close friend, Jonathan. David and Jonathan had promised each other that as long as they live, they would show kindness to each other's families. After all those years, David did not hate Saul, even though Saul hated David and had sought to kill him numerous times.*
  - *David had truly forgiven Saul and had truly loved Jonathan and was willing to keep his promise even though no one was there to hold him accountable to it.*

- *His kindness was not based on the merit of Mephibosheth.*
- **How is Mephibosheth described in this story?**
  - *Several times in the story we are reminded that he was crippled or lame in his feet. This seems to be the distinguishing characteristic of Mephibosheth.*
  - *But David primarily sees him as a son of King Saul and Jonathan. His previous identity as son of his dear friend Jonathan and a member of the royal family is more important to David than the fact that he is lame.*
- **How do you think Mephibosheth felt when he was brought before the king?**
  - *He was probably scared, perhaps he thought that he had finally been found out and that he would be punished by David for all the evil that Saul had done to David. Mephibosheth falls down on his face before David in respect.*
- **How does David choose to treat Mephibosheth? What sorts of things does David give Mephibosheth?**
  - *“Don’t be afraid.” Immediately reassures him that this is a meeting of peace, not revenge.*
  - *Identifies and treats Mephibosheth as a son of the king.*
  - *Restores to him the land that had been Saul's.*
  - *Gives Ziba and his household as servants to care for the land and bring him the produce.*
  - *Offers him a seat at David’s table all the days of his life (which would imply that Mephibosheth would live in Jerusalem with the king in his house).*
- **Who normally lives in the king’s house and eats at the king’s table? What does this tell us about David?**
  - *The family! Only the king’s wife, children, and closest advisors and friends would eat at his table. Mephibosheth is being invited to a place at the table where only the king’s family is welcome. Mephibosheth is being treated as if he is one of David’s own sons.*
  - *David, the king of Israel, delights to extend kindness to this person who doesn’t deserve it. There is nothing Mephibosheth can contribute to the work of David’s kingdom; David expects nothing in return from Mephibosheth for the kindness that he is showing him.*
- **How does this remind you of how God treats us?**
  - *This story is for everyone who repents and puts their faith in Jesus! We are like Mephibosheth: hopeless, helpless, afraid, hiding, undeserving. But the King, in his abundant and eternal kindness, has invited us to eat at his table all the days of our lives as one of his own children.*
  - *Mephibosheth moved from being an orphan to being a son of the king, simply because the king declared it to be true. God does the same for us when we trust in Christ.*
  - *He never again needed to live in fear of being outcast but in the freedom of knowing he was part of the king's family. Mephibosheth was no longer known primarily by his physical disability; instead he was identified as a child of the king.*
  - *This is the heart of the gospel! We are unable to save ourselves out of our terrible situation. The only solution is for the King to extend undeserved kindness to us and make us a member of his family. It’s not because of anything we have done.*
- **Does Mephibosheth’s place at David’s table come at a cost? Who pays the cost? What is this a future picture of?**

- *David pays for Ziba's care. Also Ziba and his servants commit to serving Mephibosheth all of their days.*
- *Points forward to Christ: the greater King, the greater Promise Keeper, the greater Servant, who paid with his own life so that we could be reconciled to God and given a seat at his table forever.*
- **Mephibosheth's life has been completely changed. He changed from living like an orphan to living as a beloved child. What is life like for abandoned orphans? Why is it so difficult to not have a father?**
  - *Lonely; no help; no one to depend on; no one who cares; no sense of belonging; no provision; deep sense of abandonment; uncertain future; need to provide for oneself; tendency to beg, borrow, steal instead of trusting in a father to provide; no place to call home; no shelter; no protection; easily gets into trouble; independent; does not need to listen to authority; has no parent or authority to tell him or her what to do or how to live; no good clothes; looked down on; people don't want to touch or associate.*

### General Application Questions (discuss with whole group)

- **What are some ways that we might be living daily as if we are spiritual orphans?**
  - *May feel worthless because of being poor, less educated, less talented, less beautiful, less important than others.*
  - *May be anxious or fearful because we feel alone, helpless, or as if we don't belong.*
  - *May worry about our future, not trusting that our Father will care for us.*
  - *May feel that no one is providing for us so we need to steal it for ourselves.*
  - *May reject God's rule over our lives or ignore his law because we don't trust that He is leading us well.*
  - *May complain and grumble about our lives or be jealous of others.*
- **Jesus kindly invites us to dine at the Father's table! To be with Him, to be nourished by Him. What are some ways that we (even as Christians) sometimes fail to truly enjoy the feast He provides us at His table?**
  - *Shame, guilt, anxiety, fear, discontent.*
- **Ephesians 2:8,9: "It is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works so that no one can boast." God's kindness to us is pure grace, totally undeserved. Sometimes instead of feeling too unworthy to be loved by God, we believe that we deserve God's favor and good treatment. What are some of the reasons our hearts may feel this way? How does that rob us of the full riches of the Gospel?**
  - *Because we feel we have been faithful, generous, obedient. Or because we are talented, wealthy, educated, well known, important - at least more than other people!*
  - *Makes us less grateful to God and less dependent on the Gospel of Jesus, less able to rejoice in His great love for us!*

### Personal Application Questions (choose one or two for small group discussion)

- In what way do you sometimes feel the same as an orphan would feel? How do you view yourself more by things that are true on your surface than by what the King has declared to be true about you?

- What is one way that you sometimes fail to feast at the Father's table? Do you truly believe that the King delights to see you personally come into his presence? How can you more fully experience the freedom and joy that Jesus offers you at His table?
- What is one way that you are tempted to think that God loves you because you deserve His love? How could that rob you of the full riches of the true gospel? How can you repent today of this pride?