

Dining with the King

2 Samuel 9:1-13

Introduction

Have you ever been invited to dinner at the White House? What would it be like to dine with the president of the United States? Afterward what would you tell your friends? Would you tell them about the trip to the White House? Would you report on the wallpaper in the dining room? Would you explain the china pattern and wax eloquent about the silverware? Would you dwell lovingly on the food you were served? What would you think of someone who spent his whole time telling you all about the circumstances of your dinner with the president of the United States, but neglected to say anything about the man himself? If you had dinner with President Bush, I would care little about all those other things. I would be dying to hear you tell me about the man himself. What is Bush like? Is he easygoing or intense? Does he tell jokes? Is he as stupid as the press paints him to be? Forget the other stuff – tell me about the president!

It is amazing how easily we lose focus on what is really important in life. Many a successful man has looked back with regret that he did not spend more time with his children and less in his business. We so easily get caught up in our own busy-ness and lose track of what is important. This happens in ministry, too. Mark can get so focused on running this camp that he forgets why we are here. So this morning as we begin our week, let's refocus on the reason behind our camp and the goal of all ministry. To do this, let's open to 2 Samuel 9 and read the whole chapter.

Mephibosheth

This story takes place sometime after David had established himself as king of all Israel. Saul was Israel's first king. Saul was tall, handsome, and strong – but Saul was weak in character. He was timid in war and vacillated in making decisions. These character flaws were aggravated by his direct disobedience to God's specific commands on several occasions. For this reason God decided to replace Saul with David. David was also handsome, but more important, he was courageous and decisive – essential traits for a leader. But most important, David had an obvious love for God. God sent the prophet Samuel secretly to anoint David as the next king over Israel. Meanwhile David grew more popular with the people. He had a magnetic personality and he won an impressive string of victories over Israel's enemies. Saul became threatened by David, and determined to kill him. For years David ran for his life, hiding in caves to escape Saul. At last Saul faced battle with a huge army of the Philistines. Israel was defeated, and Saul and his sons were killed. Saul's son Ishbosheth assumed the throne, but one tribe, Judah, recognized David as their king. For seven years there was war between David and Ishbosheth. David eventually won and was crowned king over all Israel.

If you know your history, you know what is supposed to happen next. David should kill everyone in the house of Saul. This was always the fate of the family of the losing side in a civil war. It's not simply that kings are vicious or vindictive – there is a good reason for killing all family members of the defeated king. If anyone remains alive, he is likely to make a claim to the throne and plunge the nation back into war. This happened all the time. The Battle of Hastings, between English King Harold and William the Conqueror, was provoked by conflicting claims to the English throne. Later, when Henry VIII died without a son, there was intense jockeying for the throne. Mary Tudor ruled briefly until Elizabeth took the throne. Elizabeth put Mary in the tower, but Mary kept trying to regain the throne. So Elizabeth executed her. Getting back to our story, Saul was the undisputed king of Israel, but David has supplanted him. David can claim (correctly, we might add) that God anointed him to be the next king, but Saul's heirs might see that as a cynical means of using God to advance David's own fortunes. Saul's heirs could very understandably think they had been cheated out of the kingdom. They might be sorely tempted to seek to regain the throne. This is what you would naturally expect. So it was the common practice to kill everyone in the family of the losing side to prevent further civil unrest.

Now as we consider the case of Mephibosheth, we see that he was born into the wrong side of this division in Israel. He was born into the house of Saul. As long as he was alive, Saul's supporters could use him as an excuse to revolt against David. By any normal standard, Mephibosheth ought to die.

But that is not all to the story. Because Mephibosheth was the son of Jonathan. Jonathan was the son of king Saul, but Jonathan was an ally of David. You can read in 1 Samuel how the friendship developed between David and Jonathan. They became very close, and swore faithfulness to each other. Yes, they made a covenant to be loyal to each other forever. It is on this basis that David was kind to Mephibosheth. Covenants are intergenerational, so David's loyalty to Jonathan extended to all of Jonathan's children. But David was so generous, he was even willing to be merciful to anyone in Saul's family for Jonathan's sake. Mephibosheth was in the right place to receive that mercy. But note further that as the story begins, Mephibosheth has no personal relationship with David. In fact, he is hiding out in an obscure place. Only later does he begin to know David personally.

Finally, the text goes out of its way to tell us that Mephibosheth is lame in both his feet. This was mentioned in verse 3, but then it is mentioned again at the end of the chapter – so you do not forget it! Why would the text make a point of calling attention to Mephibosheth's lameness? How does being lame in both your feet affect you? It makes it difficult to do much. In a pre-industrial society, that meant that Mephibosheth was fairly helpless. Such people were usually beggars because they had no way of supporting themselves. And in a society where physical strength was highly prized, a lame man would be despised. Turn back to 2 Samuel 5:6-8 and let's read about the conquest of Jerusalem. The Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem thought their city was impregnable, so they insulted David, saying the lame and blind could defend Jerusalem. David was a passionate man, and this angered him. He hated the Jebusites, and in return he called them the lame and the blind. All this is to illustrate that in general, physically handicapped people were despised by everyone else. Even David despised them.

Looking at the total picture, Mephibosheth had good reason to hide from David. He could reasonably have expected to be executed. But even if he had been allowed to live, David would have hated him for his deformity. Mephibosheth was facing a life of misery.

David

Now as we look at David, we are overwhelmed by the character of this man. At considerable risk to himself, his own family, and his throne, David kept his oath to Jonathan. But David did more than simply care for any of Jonathan's family who happened to be around. David sought to show mercy to all of Saul's house for Jonathan's sake. David was totally committed to the covenant with Jonathan. The text tells us that he took initiative to go looking for any remaining in Saul's family. Then when David met Mephibosheth he did not recoil at his repulsive condition. David hated the blind and the lame, but because of his love for Jonathan he welcomed Mephibosheth – in spite of his gross deformity. And then – this is the utterly astounding part – David invited him to his table.

It is easy to miss the significance of this. You live in a campus setting where your meals are served on an assembly line and you eat with anyone who happens to be in the room at the time. But outside of an institutional setting, meals take on a more intimate character. If you spend the day preparing a nice meal, you are not going to serve it to any rabble that happens by your house. You will expend the considerable time, energy, and expense for those you love. Meals are a family affair, and everyone who eats with you gains a family status. When David invited Mephibosheth to his table, he was doing more than filling his stomach. David was inviting him into intimate friendship. David might have thought that the terms of his covenant with Jonathan were satisfied if he merely kept Mephibosheth safe and fed, but David went far beyond that. David made him his friend.

You

Do you see yourself in this passage? This true story is also a parable of your own life. You were born into the losing side of a universal, eternal war – a spiritual war. Ever since Satan coveted the throne of heaven, he has been at war with God. Satan struck a deadly blow and won a great victory when he captured the hearts of Adam and Eve. When Adam and Eve committed treason against God, they sold the whole human race into slavery to Satan. All Adam's offspring enter this world as enemies of God, and everyone by rights should be hunted down and executed.

born into wrong side of the universal, eternal spiritual war
some of you were born into a family allied with God
you began with no personal relationship to God
deformed by sin

God

came looking for you
welcomes you in spite of your sin – repulsive though it was
desires more than keeping you alive – desires friendship
tells you His personal name – Yahweh
invites you to call him Father
invites you to his table

Will you come?

Lord's supper
Lord's word
this week, time with God

The Goal of Ministry

bring people to God
goal – others come to know God
 – others dine with God
this is the reason for this camp
this is the reason for RUF
goal is not to get more people in RUF
goal is not evangelism, discipleship, worship, missions, prayer, etc.
goal is God – to know Him intimately
ministry flows out of knowing God
so this week, make God your highest priority

C. David Green
RUF Summer Conference
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