2 Samuel - Commentaries by Charles Stanley

Pamphlets, Mephibosheth. Lame on Both Feet; Or, the Kindness of God

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Very early one morning, many years ago, I was reading the ninth chapter of 2 Samuel. After reading it once, I thought, “What a strange chapter, about a young man lame on both his feet.” I read it again, and still I could see nothing in it. After going through it a third time, my eye rested on these words, “I will surely show thee kindness, for Jonathan, thy father’s sake” (2 Sam. 9:7). The thought suddenly flashed upon my mind, “Ah! there is a picture of the kindness of God, through Jesus Christ.” What a picture now lay before me, like some lovely landscape, at the break of morn. As years have rolled on, the beauty of this picture has only, to my mind, increased. Many times have I been led to preach Christ from it, and seldom without souls being converted to God. This encourages me, in faith, to trace over this interesting portion of the Word of God with my readers; trusting that God will use it in blessing to many souls.

In this picture, then, of the kindness of God, there are two characters — Mephibosheth, the child of grace; and Ziba, the self-righteous man. The condition of Mephibosheth, strikingly illustrates the state of a sinner when he is brought to God.

If you turn to the fourth chapter and fourth verse of this same book, you will find he was the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, both now dead; that he had fallen, and become lame; and that since his fall he had been hid, lame on both his feet, in Lo-debar; which Hebrew word means, a place of no pasture. Being of the house of Saul, the enemy of David, he concluded, no doubt, that David would be his enemy; and therefore hid away from his presence.

How very strikingly this illustrates the condition of fallen man. No sooner had sin blinded the mind of Adam, than we read he “hid himself from the presence of the Lord God, amongst the trees of the garden” (see Gen. 3:8). And is not this man’s very condition, to the present hour? Why is that one hurrying off to the theater, or the alehouse? Ah! he knows not God. Being at enmity with God, he concludes that God is his enemy, and he dreads His presence. The thought of going this day into the presence of God would be terrifying. Does the thought give you alarm, my reader? Ah! it is because you know not God. Perhaps you may say, “I have sinned, and that makes me afraid of God.” True, you have sinned; and I have sinned; and all have sinned. But if you knew the price He has given, that He spared not His own dear Son, then you would see that God is the only one to whom you can go, as a sinner — and be assured, “The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth from all sin (see 1 John 1:7). But let us now go on with the chapter. “David said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God unto him?” (2 Sam. 9:3).

And is not this the present work of the Spirit of God? Is there not yet any of the fallen sons and daughters of Adam to whom I may show the kindness of God? No matter how deeply fallen, utterly lame, lame on both feet, and truly in the place of no pasture. For, poor, fallen sinner, wherever thou art trying to hide from God, there is nothing, in this world of misery and sin, that can make thee happy. Is there, now? Have you pursued the phantoms of Satan, or put your trust in the world’s fair promises, until your poor heart is broken with bitter disappointment, and all is a dismal void? Then, listen, I will tell you of One that will not serve thee so.

Ziba, the self-righteous man, informed the king, that Jonathan had still a son, who was lame on his feet, in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lo-debar. “Then King David sent and fetched him” (2 Sam. 9:5). Now, this fetching is very beautiful. It tells out a grace so entirely of God. Man shows kindness to those who, as he thinks, deserve it. Or he expects to get something worth the kindness in return — not so with God. Mephibosheth had not done one thing to merit the kindness He had not to do his part first, as some say. No! GRACE went to fetch him from Lo-debar, the very place where he was. And did not the Son of God come to poor sinners, just where they were? He came to fetch them, and He found them dead in trespasses and sins. And did he not take that very place, and die, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God? Eternal shame on every proud Pharisee, who, after this, will say, “Man must do his part first.”

Mephibosheth was too lame to do his part first. He had to be fetched. And He who knows both man’s utter lameness, and this fetching-grace, has said, “No man can come to Me, except the Father, which hath sent Me, draw him: and I will raise Him up at the last day” (John 6:44). And again, “All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). Ah! if it had not been for this fetching-grace, we should have all perished, in our wretched strivings to hide away from God. “And now, when Mephibosheth was come unto David, he fell on his face” (2 Sam. 9:6). What a picture of dread and fear. As the son of Saul, the hunter of the life of David, what had he to expect? The next moment the voice of stern justice might demand his life. There he lies — a picture of a trembling sinner, brought into the presence of God, with the fearful load of guilt and sin; he knows not God — he knows not what to expect.

Before we hear the words of David, let us turn to the covenant of love, as unfolded in 1 Samuel 20:14-17. Jonathan, the father of that young man, fallen at the feet of David, speaks in the fourteenth verse: —”And thou shalt not only while I live show me the kindness of the Lord, that I die not, but also thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house forever.... And Jonathan caused David to swear again, because he loved him; for he loved him, as he loved his own soul.” Did you ever visit the place of your early life, and look for the first time on the child of a dear departed friend? Then you may have some faint idea of what David felt when he looked at Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, laid at his feet. Who can tell the tender sweetness of that voice, that spoke from the bottom of his very heart — “Mephibosheth!” “Behold thy servant” (2 Sam. 9:6),” is the trembling reply. How little did he expect the unconditional grace, that was about to be shown him. “Behold thy servant,” is the highest thought of fallen man. He ventures to offer himself as a servant to God, and hopes to be saved at last for his serving. This is the religion of every human heart.

But now hear the words of David. Like the Father, in the parable of the Prodigal, he cuts him short. “Fear not: for I will surely show 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” (2 Sam. 9:7). Ah! this is like God, no conditions, no bargaining. It is not, If thou wilt do this, or if thou wilt not do that. Oh, no; it is all pure

grace! The kindness of God! “I will surely show thee kindness,” and that entirely for another’s sake. “And thou shalt eat bread at my table continually.” Was it not thus in the parable referred to, where Jesus was unfolding the unknown, boundless grace of the Father’s heart? Was there one reproach? Was there one condition? No, he fell on his neck and kissed him (Luke 15). Is not this the kindness of God? Am I misrepresenting, or, with Jesus unfolding the true character of God? Is it thus that he receives the lost sinner? Are these his words to the wretched, trembling, hell-deserving sinner, I ask? Can he, pointing to the cross of Christ, say, Fear not, I will surely show thee kindness, for Jesus’ sake? All this, too, without a single condition. All pure grace, flowing from his own overflowing heart of love.

Oh, my reader, do you thus know God? “God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace are ye saved,) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come, He might show the exceeding riches of His grace, in HIS KINDNESS toward us through Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:4-7). Can you say that this is your portion? Man would have sent a book of directions to the lame young man, to tell him how to repent, and how to cure his feet; and how to do I can’t tell what. But there is not a word of it here. No, he comes just as he is, nothing more was required. How could there, when David’s heart was already filled with love to him Above all things, Satan will strive to hide this kindness of God from the poor sinner Let God be truly known, and I need no priest on earth, or saint in heaven, to soften his heart towards me. It is already filled with love unspeakable. Are you, dear reader, feeling the burthen of sin? And have you been perplexing yourself with men’s long books of directions how you are to repent, how you are to please God and get Him to save you? Perhaps one tells you to be as opposite to Colossians 2:20 as you possibly can, and that by keeping men’s ordinances and sacraments you may hope to be saved. Another, with equally deadly effect, may tell you to be deeply sorry for your sins, (they never say how deeply,) and that you must give them all up, and love God with all your heart etc., etc.; and then you may think yourself fit to come to Christ. That is, they would fain persuade you, that you are not so utterly fallen; that you are only lame a little on one foot, and that you only need to make a crutch of Christ, and so by His help you will get on very well; and really what it comes to is, that you may merit heaven at last.

Now if you are thus bewildered and perplexed, let me beg of you to shut up, and turn away from all the schemes of men. Let your mind dwell on God, as revealed in the cross of Christ. Perhaps you may be ready to say with alarm, Then do you mean to deny repentance altogether? Far, very far, from this is my desire. And perhaps few passages of God’s Word bring out more clearly than this both what repentance is, and the true place of repentance, or that show more strikingly what produces it.

No sooner had the stream of unconditional grace been poured into the trembling heart of Mephibosheth, than, “He bowed himself, and said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?” (2 Sam. 9:8). It is thus that the goodness of God leadeth to repentance. The sinner is brought into the presence of infinite grace, and infinite holiness too. The true character of God is revealed to him in Christ Jesus. He hears the sweetest words of love divine: —”Fear not, I will surely show thee kindness.” And the effect of this is to bow self to the dust, in the sense of this overwhelming grace. This is that change of mind called repentance. But shall I tell you, my reader, that you must thus repent before you come to Christ? No, I should as soon think of asking you to feel warm first, before you come to the fire, if I saw you perishing in the cold and storm.

But, if I mistake not, what many mean by repentance is a lifting up of self, a mending of self; and, by so doing, changing the mind of God, as though He were an angry Being, and needed our good works to turn His heart to us. Did there need a change of mind in David? No; his heart was full of love. Then how can there need a change of mind in God? What is the cross, but the expression of the love of God to perishing sinners? Now, my reader, if you knew the kindness of God to you — that nothing should ever separate you from His kindness and love in Christ Jesus — would not this instantly produce an entire change of mind in you? And the more you knew the freeness of this precious love, the more would you be humbled to the dust before Him. That which you may vainly try to work up in yourself as a preliminary to salvation, or as a title to it, would be produced the moment you believed the wondrous love of God.

And now note the contrast of these two men — Ziba the servant, and Mephibosheth the son. David calls Ziba, and gives him commands, all of which he agrees to keep. “According to all that my lord the king hath commanded his servant, so shall thy servant do” (2 Sam. 9:11). The very thing Israel foolishly engaged to do at Sinai -and the very thing thousands are engaging to do in our day, who have given up Christianity and gone back to Judaism — yes, and I fear nine out of every ten who read this paper, will belong to the religion of the servant, instead of the son.

What a contrast is seen in the words of David in pure grace to the son. “I have given” (2 Sam. 9:9). “Mephibosheth shall eat bread alway at my table” (see 2 Sam. 9:10). “As for Mephibosheth, HE SHALL eat bread at my table, as one of the king’s sons” (2 Sam. 9:11). So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem, for he did eat bread continually at the king’s table; and was lame on both his feet” (2 Sam. 9:13). Not one word of grace to the servant, and not one command to the son. The one is the service of legal bondage, the other the service of the heart’s deepest affection.

Happy thy portion, child of grace! God hath given you eternal life. No longer a servant, but a royal son, at the table of your Lord. Not a sacrament to help to save you, but ever sitting at the Lord’s table, breaking and eating that bread, and drinking of that cup, that reminds you of the broken body and shed blood of Christ, by which you are saved. Yes, God has given you the bread of life, on which you shall always feed. Why do you thus continually feed on Jesus? God has willed it. He has said it, and it shall be done. If you are a believer, your condition and standing cannot possibly be that of a servant. “For to as many as received Christ, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12).

And if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17).

How immensely important it is to understand this wondrous relationship. Surely you must see that there is a great difference between the relation of a servant, and that of a son. A servant abideth not ever, but the son abideth ever. Thus grace brought Mephibosheth from his hiding-place of fear and enmity, and at once gave him all the privileges of sonship, and that without a single condition. We have seen its effect upon him, in an entire bowing of self, a thorough change of mind; yea, we shall find that his heart is won to David forever.

Cold unbelief would say, “True, he was a poor, lame thing before he was brought to David, and made a king’s son. But surely he could never enjoy the privilege of sitting at the royal table, and still be a poor lame thing.” For there are not a few who would admit that it is all grace that brings a poor, lame, lost sinner to Christ, who nevertheless imagine that when brought, his continuance and final salvation somehow depend on his own walk and obedience. This is a most bewildering and tormenting mistake. If it were true, alas! who could be saved? Every believer

who knows his own heart will say, Not me. If my final salvation depended on me for one hour, I dare not even hope to be saved. Dare you? But now what do we get in this divinely-inspired picture of the kindness of God? “He did eat continually at the king’s table; and was lame on both his feet” (2 Sam. 9:13). Precious grace!

The believer is often sorely perplexed, when he finds that as to all strength in himself to stand in the hour of trial, he is as weak now as he was before. And should he for one moment, forgetting his standing in grace as a son, begin trying to walk as a servant, he would get occupied with his poor lame feet Finding thus that, as a servant under law, he cannot please God, he would be ready to give all up in despair. My reader may have been buffeted sorely in this way. You may have looked at your poor lame walk until you have said in your heart, I surely cannot be a child of God at all! Ah! you never can get peace by looking at your lame feet. Put them under the table, and look at that with which God, in His infinite grace, has spread the table. He sets before us the remembrance of Christ. All that we are in our poor, wretched, lame, dead selves, has been judged and put to death on the cross. And God reckons our old selves dead, and buried out of His sight. He sees us now risen with Christ; yea, even in Him, sat down in the heavenly places.

Oh! yes, it is quite true, the believer is in himself as lame after conversion as he was before. He has indeed a new life — a new nature now, which he had not before; and he has the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. But still his old nature, called the flesh, is what it ever was. What is he to do then? Have no confidence in the flesh whatever; but own the grace that made him His, and keeps him His forever. Let us put our feet under the table then, and feast on the riches of divine grace spread before us. When we have come to the end of all dependence on self, the end of all vow-making, of all our resolutions — when we really own the utter ruin of the old man — then follows that calm dependence on Christ in which we begin to realize the power of His resurrection in a holy life. But self-righteous flesh will have a hard struggle before it gives up for dead. (See Rom. 7.)

The subject of the next chapter (2 Sam. 10) is kindness shown and rejected; with the judgment consequent thereon. It is the great condemning sin. The kindness of God to a guilty world has been shown. “For God so loved the world, that He gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). What kindness! But hear these solemn words: “He that believeth not is condemned already” (John 3:18). If my reader should be a rejecter of the kindness of God in the gift of His Son, think, oh! think of your eternal doom.

But I would now briefly pursue the history of these two men — types, as they were, of all at this day who have either found grace and salvation in God, or who are trying to be saved by keeping His commands.

In 2 Samuel 15 we have recorded the rebellion of Absalom. David, the true king, is rejected; and as he leaves Jerusalem, it is remarkable that he crosses the same brook that the rejected Jesus afterward crossed. “And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over: the king himself passed over the brook Kidron” (2 Sam. 15:23). When Jesus crossed over on the night of His rejection, the few that passed with Him failed to watch even one hour. And in (2 Sam. 15:30), “David went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet, and wept as he went up.” It was to this mount Jesus led his disciples, when, having been murdered by this world, and God having raised Him from the dead, He ascended into heaven — rejected by the world, but received up into glory.

Now it is when David is thus rejected, having passed this Mount Olivet, that we find the character of Ziba, the servant, brought out. (Read 2 Sam. 16:1-4.) The first thing here is a great display of service to the king — asses loaded with bread, and fruits, and wines. How is this? says the king. Where is Mephibosheth? Ziba tells the king that he is abiding at Jerusalem, trying to get the kingdom. Really this seems as if Ziba, the self-righteous man, had the best religion. Yes, and to sight, it has always seemed so. But God knoweth the secrets of all hearts. To all outward appearance, there seemed to be great zeal and devotedness in Ziba; and he had such a beautiful form of prayer. But all was hypocrisy within. The day of the return of the rejected David at last came, (2 Sam. 19:24-30,) and Mephibosheth goes forth to meet him. Yes, and the day of the return of the rejected Jesus will quickly come; and every child of grace, whether sleeping in the dust, or alive when He comes, will go forth to meet Him in the air (1 Thess. 4:15-18).

And now the true character of both comes out. Mephibosheth “had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed, until the day he came again in peace” (2 Sam. 19:24). The kindness of David had won his heart. That heart beat with affection to the rejected king; and his affection was too deep to allow him to take any place on earth but that of a sorrowing mourner, waiting the return of him he loved.

And did not Jesus count on this on the night of His rejection? “A little while, and ye shall not see Me; and again a little while, and ye shall see Me. Verily, verily, I say unto you, that ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy” (John 16:19- 20). Alas, how little have we answered the heart of our rejected Lord! I cannot make anything of it but forgetfulness of Christ, to take any other place than that Mephibosheth took the place of a sorrowing mourner, awaiting the return of Him we love.

But what about the fruits, and bread, and wine? “Wherefore wentest thou not with me, Mephibosheth?” (2 Sam. 19:25). And now the truth is made manifest. It was he who had provided the asses’ loads of fruits. But being lame, Ziba had slipped into the saddle; and thus misrepresented Mephibosheth and played the hypocrite. And now note the deep effect of grace. Mephibosheth says, “Do therefore what is good in thine eyes; for all my father’s house were but dead men before my lord the king; yet didst thou set thy servant among them that did eat at thine own table” (2 Sam. 19:27, 28). How sweet the confidence grace gives! Has my reader the settled assurance that God has given him, in pure grace, a place at His own table? Then, may you not look forward to the coming of Jesus with unmixed joy? “And the king said unto him, Why speakest thou any more of thy matters? I have said thou and Ziba divide the land” (2 Sam. 19:29). Beautiful is the reply of Mephibosheth: “Yea, let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house” (2 Sam. 19:30). It was not the land he wanted; no, his utmost wish was realized. It was the person of him who had shown him such kindness.

And is it not so, where grace has really won the heart to Christ? It is not the things of the land. “Yea, doubtless,” says the Apostle, “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:8). Oh! that we were more like Mephibosheth — more like the saints at Thessalonica — “waiting for the Son of God from heaven” (1 Thess. 1:10). Mephibosheth had received the kindness of David with the fullest confidence; in spite of all his lameness, he had never doubted the reality of David’s love, but had patiently waited for David’s return; bearing every reproach, until the time should come. The Thessalonians had also received the glad tidings of the grace of God in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance -and hence they bore with patience, and even joy, every insult and affliction from the hands of

their enemies. And what was the secret power of this? They waited for Jesus from heaven. The real children of God have always been hated and slandered — yea, often burnt at the stake — by these boasting law-keepers for salvation.

But what a day is coming! Who can tell how soon He may come for whom we wait? His very last words were “Surely I come quickly; Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20). Did David return, and will not David’s Lord? Yes, our eyes shall soon behold Him. Oh, bright and blessed hope! Not the millennium. Not fulfillments of prophecy. These are blessed in their place — but it is Jesus Himself that the believer, who has been washed in His blood, longs to see.

This beautiful illustration stretches still further on, in 2 Samuel 21 — the day of judgment on the house of Saul. “But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, because of the Lord’s oath that was between them, between David and Jonathan, the son of Saul” (2 Sam. 21:7). This closes the history of this child of grace. And long after Jesus shall have returned, and His kingdom have been set up; when the Church of God shall long have enjoyed the heavenly glory of Christ, and Israel shall have enjoyed the glory of the kingdom on earth; yea, even when the great white throne shall be set, and when the fallen sons of Adam shall stand before that throne; then, not one that was numbered in the family of grace, in the counsels of eternity, no, not even one, shall be lost. But where will the careless sinners, or even the doers for salvation, appear in that day? Find me a man that professes to be a keeper of the law, that is not a breaker of the law. Can you, my reader, or can I, stand before that throne on the ground of our doings? Impossible. Surely, the man that pretends to be better than his neighbor, must be a hypocrite; for God says, there is no difference — all have sinned. No, no! it is not by works that any sinner can be saved. If you can find a man that is not a sinner, well, let him try. But a sinner needs pardon. “And without shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb. 9:22). Blessed Jesus, thou hast borne the wrath, the curse, the judgment, due to thy people’s sins and now unhindered kindness and eternal peace are the happy portion of every soul that rests in thee. Look at the cross, my reader, and listen. Does not God speak there to thee? “I will surely show thee kindness.” But must there be no works in return? Oh! yes, real, deep, heart-service — the fruit of saving faith. How many works that seem to be good works before men, are really naught in the sight of God! Men load themselves with heavy burdens of self-righteous doings; and yet, what are they all, but the mere rejection of the unmerited kindness of God?

The deeper thy assurance of the unchangeable kindness of God to thee, a worthless sinner, the deeper will be thy hatred of sin, and the fuller thy joy in whole-hearted, devoted service to Christ; and the more earnestly, though patiently, wilt thou wait for His return from heaven.

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