

MEPHIBOSHETH

by Charles Stanley

Stanley's narrative exposition of Mephibosheth's story from 2 Samuel, illustrating God's unconditional grace and kindness toward fallen sinners who are completely helpless, unable to contribute to their own rescue.

2 Chapters

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Mephibosheth by Charles Stanley (1821-1890)

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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." 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 morning. As years have rolled on, the beauty of this picture has, 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 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 that "he hid himself from the presence of the Lord God, among the trees of the garden" (Genesis 3:8). And is not this man's very condition to the present hour? 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 paid, 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 us from all sin." 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?" And is not this the present work of the Spirit of God? Showing the fallen sons and daughters of Adam the kindness of God, no matter how deeply fallen, utterly lame, lame on both feet, and truly in the place of no pasture they may be? Ah, poor, fallen sinner, wherever you are trying to hide from God, there is nothing in this world of misery and sin that can make you 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 you 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." 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 yet say, "Man must do his part first."

Mephibosheth was too lame to do his part first. He had to be fetched. 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." 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 yet 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 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," 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 who knows not God. 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." 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, is without a single condition. All is pure grace, flowing from His own overflowing heart of love.

O 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 ye are 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" (Ephesians 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 cure his feet, how to appear to the best advantage, and do - I can't tell what. But there is not one word of it here. No, he comes just as he is; nothing more is required. How could there be, when it was a question of David acting according to what was in his own heart? 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 man on earth, or saint in heaven, to soften His heart toward me. It is already filled with love unspeakable. Are you, dear reader, feeling the burden of sin? And have you been perplexing yourself with men's long books of directions as to how you are to feel, and how you are to please God and get Him to save you? Perhaps one tells you that by keeping the ordinances and sacraments you may hope to be saved. Another, with equally deadly effect, may tell you that you must have such and such an experience before God will receive you. 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 listen to God and turn away from all the schemes of men. Let your mind dwell on God, as revealed in the cross of Christ. There, as you gaze upon Him in His sufferings for your sins, in love thus atoning for them that you may be free, can you do anything but hate your sins, and repent of them, and abhor yourself for having committed them? Ah, there is nothing like gazing at the cross to produce repentance in a poor sinner. No sooner had this 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?" It is thus that the goodness of God leads 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: for 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 "repentance unto life."

If I mistake not, many mean by repentance a kind of lifting up of self, a mending of self by which a change in the mind of God is effected toward them, as though He were our enemy 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. And 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 as expressed in His Son Jesus Christ and in His atoning death, it would 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 mark 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." 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." "Mephibosheth shall eat bread always at my table." "As for Mephibosheth, HE SHALL eat at my table, as one of the king's sons."

"So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem: for he did eat continually at the king's table; and was lame on both his feet." 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 worship of the heart's deepest affection.

Happy your portion, child of grace! God has 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 your 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. You are a son; your place can never be that of a servant. "But as many as received Him [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" (Romans 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, and 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 I." 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." Precious grace!

"The grace that sought and found me, Alone can keep me there." 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 (Romans 8:8), 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 rest 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 own poor, wretched, lame selves, has been judged and put away by the cross. And God reckons our old selves, dead and buried out of His sight. He sees us now risen with Christ; yes, even in Him, seated 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 Christ's, 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 hope in self, and own the utter ruin of the old man, then follows that calm dependence on Christ in whose communion lies the power for 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." 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 in this day who have either found grace and salvation in God, or who are trying to be saved by keeping His commands. In chapter 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 also himself passed over the brook Kidron." When Jesus passed over on the night of His rejection, the few that passed with Him failed to watch even an hour. And in the 30th verse, "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 chapter 16:1-4). The first thing here is a great display of service to the king—asses loaded with bread, and fruits and wine. 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 knows the secrets of all hearts. To all outward appearances there seemed to be great zeal and devotedness in Ziba; and he had a beautiful form of prayer. But all was hypocrisy within. The day of the return of the rejected David at last came (chapter 19:24-30), and Mephibosheth went 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 Thessalonians 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." 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, awaiting 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?" 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 mark the deep effect of grace. Mephibosheth says, "Do therefore what is good in thine eyes. For all of 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." 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." 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." 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" (Php 3:8). Oh, that we were more like Mephibosheth—more like the saints at Thessalonica—waiting for the Son of God from heaven. 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 Ghost, 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. 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" (Revelation 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 chapter 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." 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; yes, 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, and the doers for salvation, appear in that day? Find me a man that professes to be a keeper of the law, who 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 is no remission. 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 you? "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 nothing 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 your assurance of the unchangeable kindness of God to you, a worthless sinner, the deeper will be your hatred of sin, and the fuller your joy in whole-hearted, devoted service to Christ; and the more earnestly, though patiently, will you wait for His return from heaven.

C. S.

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