

VALUED

2 Samuel 9:1-13

Promises made – promises kept. How important is that? If we have children or grandchildren in our lives, then we quickly learn how important keeping a promise is to them. As adults we tend to view things through various filters such as “plans changed” or “extenuating circumstances” rather than the unfiltered version of “just do what you promised.” The disappointment of unkept or unfulfilled promises can be hurtful to a child and may tend to make them skeptical of whether they can really trust adults. A more serious result is that failure to keep promises introduces or strengthens character flaws in the person making the promise. We recognize that “intentionally making a promise that one does not intend to keep” is a way to manipulate behavior in others and shows a serious lack of integrity. The more it happens the more the principle of integrity is weakened in the character of that person.

In our interactions with God, one of the most important beliefs we have is that we can count on “what He has promised” will actually happen. Some promises from God are conditional and others are not. Many of His promises do not have a stated chronological time associated with them, but some do. A few examples of specific times related to things that God spoke through His prophets was the seventy years of exile in Babylon, the 490 years given to the Jews to get prepared for the coming of the Messiah, and the statements of Jesus regarding the tribulation associated with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple happening within the generation of His disciples.

David had experienced the faithfulness and integrity of God in his own life in that the promises associated with the prophecy of Samuel that “David would be king” had actually come to pass even though no specific time has been assigned to the accomplishment of that promise. Since David was characterized as “a man after God’s own heart,” he was careful to follow up on promises that he had made to others. One such promise was associated with his dear friend Jonathan. In 1 Samuel 20:14-15 we see a request from Jonathan that he made of David when they both realized that the end was approaching for the reign of Saul. Jonathan had David swear (verse 17) that when David became king that he would show “the kindness of the Lord” to him and to his family and would not follow the practices of other nations’ kings of killing the family of the previous king.

As it turned out, the first part of that promise to which David swore of showing kindness to Jonathan was not an issue since Jonathan had died before David was formally recognized as king of Israel. The second part of the promise was with regard to the “house of Jonathan” and apparently David was not immediately aware of or did not have occasion to think about any survivors of Jonathan’s family. After David had been established as king of Israel and “the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies,” David thought about his promise to Jonathan and wanted to do what he could regarding the “house of Jonathan” even to the extent of going beyond Jonathan’s directed descendants but would even consider “the house of Saul.”

Searched – 9:1-5

¹ Then David said, “Is there yet anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” ² Now there was a servant of the house of Saul whose name was Ziba, and they called him to David; and the king said to him, “Are you Ziba?” And he said, “I am your servant.” ³ The king said, “Is there not yet anyone of the house of Saul to whom I may show the kindness of God?” And Ziba said to the king, “There is still a son of Jonathan who is crippled in both feet.” ⁴ So the king said to him, “Where is he?” And Ziba said to the king, “Behold, he is in the house of Machir the son of Ammiel in Lo-debar.” ⁵ Then King David sent and brought him from the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, from Lo-debar. 2 Samuel 9:1-5 (NASB95)

David asked a question of someone who was associated with his court and immediate action was taken to find a person who could answer his question. No one questioned the king and when he spoke there was a response that was directed toward making whatever he wanted done actually happen. There was no open criticism and nothing was overtly done to oppose his wishes. He was “the king” and everyone else was either his servant or his slave. There was no individual choice of a person deciding whether or not he or she agreed with the king without consequences.

To live under such a system could be extremely good or extremely bad for those who might be subjects of the king. The “good” extreme would happen if the king wanted only what was best for those subject to him. The “bad” extreme would happen if the king was concerned mainly about his own interests and really did not care what happened to his subjects. This is exactly the contrast we see when we consider the Kingdom of God versus the kingdom of darkness or the kingdoms of the world system.

A person named Ziba was found who knew what had happened to Saul’s extended family and, in particular, about the only child of Jonathan who was named Mephibosheth. Ziba had been a servant of Saul and probably was living independently at the time. He knew about the son of Jonathan, where he lived, and with whom he was living. Apparently, Jonathan’s son was keeping a low profile since he was likely fearful that King David might attempt to eliminate him since some might consider him to be a legitimate heir to Saul’s throne. It is unlikely that he knew anything about the covenant between Jonathan and David.

It is likely just coincidental that the father of the man (Machir) with whom Mephibosheth was living was named Ammiel which was also the name of Bathsheba’s father. The location was named Lo-debar which could be literally translated as “no pasture.” This word is made up of two words (“lo” meaning no and another word whose root is related to “speaking”) which might imply that Lo-debar was not the name of the location but a description of the condition of Mephibosheth in that he “had nothing to speak of.” In other words, it might simply mean that he was destitute.

As we read this account, it is interesting that the words of David regarding what he wanted to do (show the kindness of God) are essentially identical to the words Jonathan spoke in his request to David approximately fifteen years before as recorded in 1 Samuel 20:14-15. Even though fifteen years had passed and Jonathan was deceased and no one else knew of this promise (except God), David was motivated to fulfill it and be true to that which he had sworn.

It would have been easy for David who had become an important king and since he had no knowledge of any legitimate descendants of Saul to ignore his sworn promise to Jonathan. David could have justified ignoring the oath because of the suffering he and his family had endured because of Saul’s hatred of David. David did not ignore it since the motivation to do something came from the love he had for Jonathan who had legitimate legal claims to the throne of Saul but willingly chose to defer to David since he recognized David as God’s choice to be king.

The motives of true kindness may come about and be stimulated by seeing a need or hearing an appeal for help. However, the highest type of kindness is spontaneous and self-motivated which is a good description of what motivates God. He is His own motive and law.

The “kindness of God,” mentioned by David is representative of the highest ideals where what we do is totally unselfish and seeks to bring glory to God. Of course, the source of such an attitude is from God Himself since that is the type of kindness that God has shown to us.

As we minister to others for their benefit, then we are showing the same mercy and

compassion that God has shown to us.

Extended – 9:6-8

⁶ Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, came to David and fell on his face and prostrated himself. And David said, “Mephibosheth.” And he said, “Here is your servant!” ⁷ David said to him, “Do not fear, for I will surely show kindness to you for the sake of your father Jonathan, and will restore to you all the land of your grandfather Saul; and you shall eat at my table regularly.” ⁸ Again he prostrated himself and said, “What is your servant, that you should regard a dead dog like me?” 2 Samuel 9:6–8 (NASB95)

We are not told what information Mephibosheth was given when the persons whom David sent arrived first came to Mephibosheth. It was very likely upsetting or at least caused a lot of questions to come to mind about what might be the reason for such a summons to see the king. Those who delivered the message may not have known the purpose and were just carrying out an order from the king.

It is likely that Mephibosheth would have responded to coming into the presence of the king the way he did regardless of what he had initially been told was the purpose of meeting the king. The bowing down and reference to being a servant was accepted protocol in such situations. Even the prophet Nathan would bow with his face to the ground when he came into the presence of David. What is even more surprising was a similar reaction from Bathsheba when David reassured her that her son Solomon would be crowned king in David’s place.

It is not surprising that David immediately encouraged Mephibosheth to not be afraid. Not only did David not intend any harm for Mephibosheth but he was going to be blessed beyond anything he could have imagined happening to him. David was in a position of being able to be very generous to Mephibosheth and he gave him all the land that was associated with the family of Saul. This grant may have been what was required under the Mosaic Law regarding property in Israel. While David did not have to do what he did, he was in compliance with what people would understand as the right and fair thing to do since he was the only living descendant of Saul who could inherit the land.

David went a step beyond this provision and had Mephibosheth essentially become part of David’s household and eat at his table. This extra benefit may have been a result of the physical condition of Mephibosheth who was limited in what he could do because of a childhood injury to both his feet.

Mephibosheth’s reaction was to show gratitude to David by again bowing low before him. The first time he bowed low was out of regard for David being the king and this time he bowed low as an expression of gratitude. In addition to prostrating himself before David, Mephibosheth referred to himself in despicable terms. He said that he was no better than a dead dog. Such a statement may have been a typical expression of that time by someone who wanted to show humility and gratitude for some benefit they did not think they deserved. We have probably known people who go overboard in telling us how much they did not deserve some gift as a way to show humility. This was characteristic of the way people in that culture expressed themselves in the presence of someone they considered to be in a high position. Alexander MacLaren suggested that “A little gratitude is better than whining professions of unworthiness.”

Planned – 9:9-13

⁹ Then the king called Saul’s servant Ziba and said to him, “All that belonged to Saul and to all his house I have given to your master’s grandson. ¹⁰ “You and your sons and your servants shall cultivate the land for him, and you shall bring in the produce so that your master’s grandson may have food; nevertheless Mephibosheth your master’s grandson shall eat at my table regularly.” Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. ¹¹ Then Ziba said to the king, “According to all that my lord the king commands his servant so your servant will do.” So Mephibosheth ate at

David's table as one of the king's sons.¹² Mephibosheth had a young son whose name was Mica. And all who lived in the house of Ziba were servants to Mephibosheth.¹³ So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, for he ate at the king's table regularly. Now he was lame in both feet. 2 Samuel 9:9–13 (NASB95)

Granting control of the land that had belonged to Saul to the son of Jonathan could have been considered a mixed blessing since Mephibosheth was lame in both feet. He was not able to do work that would be needed to make the land productive and he likely was not in possession of any wealth (other than the land) to pay to have the work done. David solved that problem by having Ziba (who had been a servant of Saul) and his family of fifteen sons and twenty servants to cultivate land for Mephibosheth.

The assignment of Ziba and his sons and servants to serve Mephibosheth was probably a significant disruption in the lives of all these people. We are not told what Ziba had been doing since the death of Saul. This assignment may have been galling to Ziba's pride, and may account for his conduct later on when Absalom rebelled against David. Ziba went with provisions for David, and said that Mephibosheth, hoping to have the kingdom restored to him, had remained in Jerusalem. When David heard this, he gave Ziba all the inheritance of Mephibosheth. After the insurrection was over and David returned to Jerusalem, Mephibosheth said that Ziba had failed to help him leave Jerusalem and lied about him to David. Since David could not determine which of these two were truthful, he divided the possessions between the two of them.

It is probable that the estate that remained with Mephibosheth was passed on to his son named Mica so that the kindness that David wanted to shown to those of the house of Saul for the sake of Jonathan did benefit many others.

David had experienced the kindness and beneficence of God and he put those blessing into practice by blessing others. We could argue that Mephibosheth was somewhat like all of humanity in that he was born into a family that once had a good position but that family had been rejected because of sin. We, as the seed of Adam, were in a position of having nothing on our own and were in a position of extreme need and could not help ourselves. Just as David (motivated by love) took the initiative to help Mephibosheth, God took the initiative to save us from our condition of being under condemnation.

That which God has done for us in Christ Jesus then becomes our pattern in the way we are to value others by reaching out to those who are separated from God and then to extend to them the invitation to become part of the family of God.