

Prayer

Thank You, Heavenly Father, for the gift of this day, which brings with it the fresh promise of what is possible as Your Holy Spirit works through us. Even if we never know the full extent of Your plans, may we do everything You would have us do with vigour, and so find fulfilment in every part of our lives. May Your eternal plans be completed, and may we rejoice in them forever. Thank You, Heavenly Father: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Land

Pray for the Kingdom of God to come and defeat all the powers of evil. Pray for our world which will one day be 're-created' by the Lord in glory to make His new earth.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the fellowship of believers throughout the world
- Pray for small businesses which are closing due to the economy
- Pray for all those caught up in the scandals which feed the press

Meditation

Sometimes, when we are tired of the life you have given us,
The strength seems to be sapped from our spiritual reserves.
We appreciate Your promises, but then we question them
Whilst trying to find some answers to our passing problems,
Not realising that in faithfulness, you will never let us go.

Hold us firmly, do not let us slip or fall;
Show us the way when we can see nothing,
Deal with us carefully and protect our fragility,
Calm our nerves when we are touched by fear;
And speak clearly when should listen to Your advice.

For discipleship counts when in our distress, we trust our all to You.

Bible Study - 2 Samuel 9:1-8

¹ David asked, 'Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I may show kindness for the sake of Jonathan?' ² Now there was a servant of the house of Saul whose name was Ziba. They summoned him to David, and the king asked him, 'Are you Ziba?' He said, 'I am your servant!' ³ The king said, 'Is there anyone left of the house of Saul to whom I may show God's faithfulness?' Ziba said to the king, 'There is still a son of Jonathan, but he has crippled feet.' ⁴ The king said to him, 'Where is he?' Ziba replied, 'He is in the house of Machir son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar.' ⁵ Then King David summoned Him.

⁶ Mephibosheth son of Jonathan son of Saul came to David, bowed down and honoured him. David said, 'Mephibosheth!' He answered, 'I am your servant.' ⁷ David said to him, 'Do not be afraid, for I will show you kindness because of your father Jonathan; I will restore to you all the land of your grandfather Saul,

and you yourself shall always eat at my table.’⁸ He bowed down and said, ‘What is your servant, that you should have regard for a dead dog such as I?’

Review

David’s control of the newly unified Kingdom of Israel grew, and God had blessed with the promise that a descendant of His would continue His lineage on the throne for ever (2 Sam 7:16). As part of the establishment of an effective government in Jerusalem, he then took action to deal with any potential internal threats which might come from dissident elements within Israel who still remained loyal to the previous ruler, King Saul.

David’s relationship with the House of Saul Saul had an extensive family and was loyally supported within his home tribe of Benjamin, and David had already sought to establish good relationships with them by distancing himself from Saul’s death. Even Jerusalem was on the edge of the territory of Benjamin, and this gave David immediate contact with any supporters of Saul. It was natural therefore, that David should enquire whether any of Saul’s family members were still alive. If there were potential leaders within Saul’s family, they would be a threat to him and his authority. It comes as a pleasant surprise therefore that the result of David’s enquiry is a touching story which put an end to rivalry and dissent (of the kind that typified the first few chapters of 2 Samuel). It is a sign that God’s blessing recently given to David’s ‘house’ (2 Sam 7:5-16) was indeed bearing fruit.

You will probably recall David’s close friendship with Jonathan, Saul’s son and heir, who offered David his birthright as a pledge of friendship (1 Sam 18:1ff, 20:42ff). In 2 Samuel 4:4 we learned that Jonathan had a son called Mephibosheth, who was dropped by his nurse in the panic that followed the defeat of Saul on Mount Gilboa, the battle in which Jonathan died. This accident had left Mephibosheth unable to walk properly, and because he was therefore ‘imperfect’ he would never have been considered as capable of claiming the throne of Israel, and was shielded from public view by the remnants of Saul’s family.

Ziba and David’s promise of covenant love David found out what was happening amongst Saul’s supporters by summoning a servant of the family called Ziba. Although David’s enquiry was highly political, what he actually said to Ziba is interesting; ‘is there anyone left of the house of Saul to whom I may show God’s faithfulness?’ The last two words of the question are one word in Hebrew, the famous word ‘cheseth’ which is uniquely used in the Old Testament to refer to the faithful and unchanging ‘covenant’ love of God. David was the recipient of this covenant himself, in the form of God’s promises to him through the prophet Nathan (2 Sam 7), and now he sought to extend this to others. It is a good example of sharing the benefits of God’s blessings, a principle of discipleship we usually associate with Jesus and His teaching ‘love one another just as I have loved you ...’ (John 13:34).

Revealing Mephibosheth Ziba revealed the location of Jonathan’s son and heir, Mephibosheth, and this must have revived in David’s heart the memory of his close friendship with Jonathan. It was natural therefore that when Mephibosheth arrived at David’s court and was presented to the King, David greeted him with generosity. Mephibosheth probably feared for his life when coming to court to see David, especially when others who were perceived threats to David’s throne had been killed! He would not have known that David was wanting to show the covenant kindness of God to him, and this explains the subservient and worshipful response of Mephibosheth in verse 8 ‘what is your servant, that you should have regard for a dead dog such as I?’ Then, to honour the memory of his father Jonathan, and also send a signal to Benjamin and all Israel that he honoured the memory of Saul, David effectively made Mephibosheth a member of his own court. He also restored Saul’s lands and property to Mephibosheth and ensured it was managed in the interests of the royal court, through Mephibosheth.

Today’s story is simple and comes as a welcome relief from the early chapters of 2 Samuel with their bloody wars and court intrigue. We who read the story can be relieved that David was able to organise his court in a way that reflected the love of God rather than the warlike nature of the times. All this reminds us that whatever spiritual blessings we have received, the Lord longs to give us more according to the work He wants us to do. When David was a youth, Samuel had anointed him, but it was not a sufficient blessing of the Spirit for the whole of David’s life; it was the start of a long process that led eventually to his being King not just according to God’s authority, but by the will of the people as well. The Lord blessed David in new ways so that His purposes for Israel would be accomplished. The message for us is simple. We should not rest on the spiritual blessings we have received from the Lord in the past. Having begun a work in us, He will wish to bless us further so that we can do more in His service and become, like David within this story, more like Him.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss in your group what you believe to be David’s intention in asking about the house of Saul.
2. For what reasons might David have granted Saul’s land and property to Mephibosheth?
3. Because Mephibosheth was a cripple, he would never have been acceptable as a king of Israel. Would a ‘disabled’ leader be acceptable to people today?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

In each different phase of my life the Lord has given me new gifts for new challenges. I still recall the first blessings of God with affection, but I know that I need more today in order to do the new things the Lord requires of me. Now, it is easy to look back and identify what God has done in the past, but far harder to work out what is happening now and understand how it fits into God’s plan of things for the future. Personally, I believe that God has a clear plan for each of us and does not wish us to be idle in waiting for things to happen. He always has something for us to do in the present, and He is with us, helping us to do what He wants, so that the future will make sense when it comes.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *The challenge of our text is to recognise that the Lord may wish to bless us with a fresh outpouring of His Spirit, or some other spiritual blessing, which will enable us to fulfil our calling. Are we ready for this?*
- *Find someone in your wider working life who is in need, and try to offer practical help to them in whatever way is appropriate. Give freely that you may be blessed.*

Final Prayer

You grant us power to do Your will, O Lord, and we praise You for this. Lead us on to be able and willing to receive more from You and do more for you as time goes by, and so become more fruitful in Your Kingdom. We pray this in confidence because of Your gracious and faithful love, O Lord: AMEN