

Children – you’ve got to love ‘em, haven’t you?

Someone said, “When my kids get wild and unruly, I just use a safe playpen – when they’ve **finished**, I just climb out!”

Someone else said, “Children really brighten up a household – they never turn the lights off!”

Yet another person said, “Children are a great comfort in your old age – and they help you reach it faster too!”

No matter their faults, you’ve got to love ‘em, haven’t you?

But one of the saddest things I find as a teacher is the amount of children who have a parent who has no time for them. Whether it’s because of the demands of life or the desire to have a career; some parents want a child but they don’t want the responsibility that comes with it. Perhaps social life and career path are the priority. Let a childminder or crèche look after them – they’re taken care of so the parent doesn’t have to worry.

Either that or mum or dad has moved on, the child was part of their **old** life, so doesn’t fit into the new life. It’s easy to change partners, end commitment and move on nowadays. As long as they pay some maintenance, they feel they’ve discharged their responsibility to their child. They’ve no time **for** or **with** their child. It’s so sad – no-one suffers **more** than children such as these.

When we celebrated Father’s Day recently we reminded ourselves of the tremendous role and also the responsibility of being a father – the Bible has so much to say about it, based of course on **God’s** relationship with men and women. So it’s important to see what God - the Creator of everything - has to say about it.

You’ll remember the story that Jesus told to illustrate the relationship between God and man, the story of the prodigal son – the son who wanted his inheritance early so that he could do all the things he wanted; well, his money soon ran out and he was in the gutter, so he decided to go back to his father who welcomed him home with great rejoicing. Remember?

That was a **story** Jesus told to illustrate God’s amazing love, and if you want to read it yourself later, it’s in Luke’s gospel chapter 15. But I want us to read a lovely story from the Old Testament, but it’s a **true** story about people who actually lived, a story which has a wonderful message for us today, some thousands of years later.

Can we read together from the second book of Samuel. If you open your Bible at halfway, you'll come to Psalms; go halfway between the front and there, you should come to the books of Samuel. (Church Bible page 312) 2 Samuel chapter 9. [Read]

OK, so **who are the characters** in our story? Remember, these are real people who lived, this is **history**, real events, real people.

Mephibosheth was the son of Jonathan and grandson of King Saul, the first king of the people of Israel. But David was God's anointed, God chose **him** to be the great king of Israel after Saul's death, and not Jonathan. This meant that David and Jonathan should have been **enemies**, rivals for the throne. Saul **did** have a go, **numerous** goes in fact, at removing David from the picture, but David and Jonathan became and **remained** firm friends.

Jonathan accepts God has chosen David, and we read in 1 Samuel 20 that they swear lasting friendship between their two families. Verse 42 of that chapter says, *'Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the Lord saying, "The Lord is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants for ever."'*

So that's why we read in verse 1 of our chapter *'Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?'* David is showing kindness and compassion to **Mephibosheth** because of his promise to Jonathan.

But the custom at that time was to **remove** all possible rivals to the throne, so it wasn't uncommon to see the incoming king disposing of such men. In fact that's what David's soldiers **expected** to do and they killed Jonathan's brother Ish-Bosheth, Mephibosheth's uncle. So what of Mephibosheth and what is he to expect?

Well, we know that Mephibosheth has been orphaned, destined to grow up without a father. His father and grandfather had died in **battle**, and when this news was brought home, he had to flee. But his nanny dropped him and he became crippled, lame in both feet. He couldn't walk, and so he wouldn't be able to work either.

We read of this in 2 Samuel 4. So since that time his existence has been kept secret, he's been in **hiding**. Until **now**, that is. David finds out about him and where he is, and he has him summoned to court.

You can imagine what's going through Mephibosheth's head as he approaches Jerusalem. He must have thought, 'This is it – David's going to do away with me.' He thought he was a **dead** man, and he refers to himself in verse 8 as 'a dead dog.'

But **no** – quite the opposite. David says in verse 7, '*Don't be afraid, ... for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table.*'

Mephibosheth could hardly believe his ears. David spared his life when he expected to be put to death; David restored his inheritance; he was to eat at the king's table. This was saying, '**I will treat you as my son,**' in effect you could say that David was **adopting** him, although there was no legal mechanism for adoption in Jewish society in those times. Verse 11 says he '*ate at David's table like one of the king's sons.*'

Mephibosheth must have come to court fearing the worst, feeling that he wasn't worthy of beneficial treatment – he was crippled, he was an orphan, and he was from a rival family to David's, an enemy. I'm sure he feared the worst, because he felt totally unworthy. And in all we're going to think about this evening, we have to forget the idea of worthiness or **unworthiness** to receive God's love. Our love for our own children doesn't always come as a result of them **deserving** to be loved, but just because they **are** our children. Even **more** so with God.

In a spiritual way we're crippled, we're damaged by sin, wrong things in our lives; spiritually we're orphans – we're **separated** from our Father God; we're rivals to God – we put **ourselves** in charge of our lives. But God's response? Love. Because God **is** love, the Bible says. He loves who he **wants** to love.

Listen to these words of David in Psalm 103: '*The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love. ... he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities* [things we've done wrong].' David himself is saying this in that Psalm, and **here** we see him **acting** like this towards Mephibosheth. David made a promise to Jonathan that he would not harm his family, here he is keeping his promise. **God** has promised to love his people, God **keeps** his promises. We're not worthy to be treated like this, but God treats those he loves as his sons and daughters.

Jesus says in John's gospel, chapter 16 verse 27, *'the Father himself [that is God] loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.'* God loves those who believe that Jesus came, died for the forgiveness of our sins, and rose from the dead having defeated death. Again in John's gospel, chapter 1 verse 12, *'to all who received him [that is Jesus], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.'* God loves those that come to him believing in Jesus and what he has done for them. We don't **earn** or **deserve** his love – by grace, he loves us. Grace, unmerited, undeserved love. This is the **only** basis for acceptance by God.

The greatest joy of adoption, is to know a parent's love; the greatest joy of becoming a Christian, is to know the **Father's** love – God the Father's love. He wants us to know him as our Father – Jesus' model prayer teaches us to bring our prayers to God addressing him as 'Our Father in heaven'. We **can** know the love of our Father in heaven.

Let's come back to our story in Samuel, and learn of the **consequences** of Mephibosheth being taken into King David's family.

David welcomes Mephibosheth to eat at his table, and verse 13 tells us that he did this all his life. What a brilliant position to be in – it's clearly extraordinary because it's mentioned 4 times here – to eat at the king's table, to be treated as the king's **son**.

When we were children at home we only sat at the table in the dining room when we had guests, when we were trying to be **posh**. The tea service came out at least twice a year, and it was **special** to eat at the table, but we were told we were only allowed to have two cakes at the most. It was **special** to eat at the table. I can't imagine, can you, what it's like around our Queen's dinner table as she sits there with Phillip and Charles and the rest of the family. I don't suppose they get many Indian takeaways at their place! I don't think they'll be sitting there with their fish and chips on their lap, watching Eastenders! I can't imagine their mealtimes.

'So Mephibosheth ate at David's table like one of the king's sons.' Verse 11. He was effectively brought into the royal family and **adopted**, treated like one of the king's sons. So what benefits did this **bring** him, and what does this teach us about being a Christian?

The adopted orphan Mephibosheth received all the privileges of being a member of the royal family; it says here that he ate at the king's table, but that should be seen as symbolic of **all** the privileges of being part of the king's family – use of the palace, use of the grounds, use of the royal horses etc etc. When you sign the legal papers of adoption, the adopted child receives **all the rights** of a son or daughter. Whatever the natural child enjoys, so does the **adopted** child – same house, same food, same school, same holidays, same restrictions, same discipline ...

There's a brilliant verse in John's gospel 1:12 which says this, '*Yet to all who received him [that is Jesus], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.*' And in his letter to the Galatians, Paul writes, '*But when the time had fully come, God sent his son [that is Jesus] born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the **full rights** of sons.*' Galatians 4:4-5.

The Son of God – Jesus - came, born of a woman, born as a man, to give us the right to become children of God, to give us the **full rights** of sons and daughters. This is what the Bible says so clearly. God doesn't need to treat us as our sins deserve, like we read earlier, because **Jesus** has taken that punishment on himself as he died there on the cross.

We're not **worthy** to become God's sons and daughters, we don't **deserve** to be his children – like Mephibosheth wasn't worthy to be a member of David's family – but God has made it possible, **only** if we receive Jesus – if we recognise that we can only be saved by Jesus' sacrifice; **only** if we believe in his name – if we see that only Jesus' rising from the dead can bring us release from death and the results of sin; only **then** do we receive the full rights of sons and daughters. '*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ.*' Galatians 3:26.

Jim Packer wrote in his book 'Knowing God', that the Son of God became the Son of Man, so that the sons of men could become sons of God.

Like we said earlier, what the adopted child wants to know **more than anything** is that they're safe and secure in the love of a father (and mother, of course). There is no more wonderful thing than to know that you are safe and secure in the love of your **heavenly Father**. John writes in his first letter, '*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the **children of God!** And that is what we **are!***' 1 John 3:1. The exclamation marks express the wonder and amazement of John as he thinks of this; '*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God! And that is what we are!*'

What an amazing thought! Mind-blowing! That we should be called the children of God! And that is what we are! Eating at the King's table! Being treated like the King's Son! My brain can't quite take it **in**. Like Mephibosheth, I'm sure. One day a crippled orphan, hiding from the king, fearing he would lose his life: the next day being welcomed at the King's table, adopted into his family, enjoying all the privileges of being a prince. From orphan to son. We were lost once, now we've been found: from orphans to sons and daughters, thanks to God's grace and mercy.

We must move on, because we need to look at other consequences of the orphan being welcomed into the king's family.

Look again at David's welcome in verse 7: *'Don't be afraid,' David said to him, 'for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table.'* David gives back to Mephibosheth the land of his ancestors, the land that he David as king, had taken for his own. The land that Mephibosheth would have had as a **right**, if the crown had been passed down through his family. The son inherits. Mephibosheth becomes an heir of the king. He has **a royal inheritance**.

Likewise those who are adopted into **God's** family. Christians have been adopted into God's family through believing that Jesus died for the forgiveness of sins. We read earlier from Galatians chapter 3 *'You are all sons of God **through faith in Christ.***' That passage runs on into chapter 4 of Galatians, and a little later we read this, Galatians 4:6, *'Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out 'Abba, Father.'* So you are no longer a slave, but a **son**; and since you are a **son**, God has made you also an **heir**.'

Before we go any further, let me just mention the use of the word 'sons' here, and not daughters, just in case some of you ladies are feeling left out. In Biblical times it was the son who **inherited**, not the daughter; so saying here that 'You are all sons' is telling us that whether we're male or female, if we are Christians, if we are therefore in God's family, we **all** inherit, **all** of us. We're **all** heirs. The inheritance belongs to **all** of us.

But just **think** about it. We are heirs of God the Father – all that is **God's**, is **ours** to experience too. **Think** about it a while. Heirs of God. Creator of everything that has ever been and ever will be. Romans 8 verse 17 tells us more: we read there, *'Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.'* 6

This is the Christian's inheritance, a share in the glory of Jesus, and in the letter to the Colossians we read that the Christian's inheritance is '*in the kingdom of light*' Colossians 1:12; it's **safe** in heaven for eternity.

Since me and my brothers and sister have moved out of the family home, my mam and dad have enjoyed numerous holidays in America, Canada, Spain and particularly Austria. And good for them – they've worked hard all their lives, and they've sacrificed **lots** while bringing us up. They deserve it. But our inheritance is gradually dwindling away, getting smaller and smaller.

God's **entire estate** is available as the inheritance for his children. All the **riches**, all the **splendour** of his heavenly kingdom. **Nothing** will diminish the greatness of this inheritance. Everything belongs to God, **nothing** can take it away from him. God is the **perfect** Father – he won't disinherit his children. We are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.

Finally, let's look at David's **fatherly care** towards Mephibosheth. Verse 9 of our passage: *Then the king summoned Ziba, Saul's servant, and said to him, 'I have given your master's grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family. You and your sons and your servants are to farm the land for him and bring in the crops so that your master's grandson may be provided for.'* Not good news for Ziba, but **great** news for Mephibosheth.

David restored Saul's land to Mephibosheth, but he recognised that that would be no **good** on its own, because he was crippled in both feet, our passage keeps telling us. He can't walk, so he's not going to be able to work the land and **provide** for himself. So David makes provision for him, so he needn't worry about a thing. Ziba and his fifteen sons and twenty servants will work the land for him so that he's provided for. David wants Mephibosheth to **prosper**.

This shows David's care, consideration and kindness towards this orphan who he's now welcomed into his family circle. The attributes of the father. Mephibosheth receives **provision** from the hands of his adoptive father.

Likewise with God: the child of God receives all he or she needs from the hand of the perfect Father. He loves his children. In Zephaniah 3:17 we read, '*The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.*' He loves with an everlasting love '*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.*' Lamentations 3:22. In Philippians we read, '*And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*' Philippians 4:19.

God wants us as his children to **know** him, he wants us to **trust** him, he wants us to live for his **glory**, he wants us to behave like his **children**, become more like him, to be holy, to be perfect, *'Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.'* Jesus says in Matthew 5:48.

God is the perfect Father. He knows that his children need to know they are loved. They need care, they need provision. But they also need guidance, correction and discipline at times.

I don't know if you've ever had the experience of walking out onto a balcony on the third floor of a building, but there's no fence around the edge of it. It feels so scary. There seems to be nothing between you and the edge. But a balcony with a fence offers a boundary, **security**, a safety barrier between you and danger. God's **discipline** provides this security, we are **safe** with him – his discipline comes because he loves us as our perfect Father and wants to keep us safe.

David treated Mephibosheth as his son; he restored his inheritance; he showed fatherly care towards him.

God wants **you** as his son or daughter – the adoption papers are ready, accept his offer in Jesus; he is waiting to grant you a wonderful inheritance with Jesus in heaven; God wants you to know that he is your heavenly Father - with all his heart he wants to care for you, to delight in you. If there's any **better** offer in life, **I've** never heard of it.

[We are heirs of God almighty]