

Charlie Brown, the “Peanuts” comic strip character, is out walking around with Lucy and Snoopy, the dog, one day. Lucy is in one of her philosophical moods. She says, “Sooner or later, Charlie Brown, there’s one thing you’re going to have to learn. You reap what you sow! You get out of life what you put into it! No more and no less!” Snoopy, the dog, begins to think deeply about what Lucy has just proclaimed. With a forlorn look on his face, he says to himself, “I’d kind of like to see a little more margin for error.” In other words, Snoopy wants grace. And grace is what I want us to think about today.

My favorite story about David is the one we’re considering today. Let’s read it first and then think about it together (2 Samuel 9) This might have been David’s finest hour. Why? Because David never acted more like God Himself than he did in this story. Now, a little background..... Saul was the first king of Israel. God became dissatisfied with Saul because he proved to be rebellious and disobedient. As a result, God rejected any continuation of Saul’s descendants on the throne of Israel. After Saul was killed in battle, God raised up David to become the next king. Now before he died, Saul became insanely jealous of David because he sensed God’s hand of blessing on David’s life. Saul tried to kill David repeatedly. Ironically, David’s greatest and closest friend was Saul’s son, Jonathan. Jonathan accepted that he would not succeed his father on the throne. He loved, protected and helped David despite his father’s hatred, but ultimately he died in battle along with Saul.

It was commonplace in that day and age, when you became the king of a country, to hunt down and kill every member of your predecessor’s family. Everyone expected you to eliminate any possible rival to your power. Jonathan knew David was going to be the next king and he knew the cultural expectation. That’s why he made a special request of his good friend, David. “And may you treat me with the faithful love of the LORD as long as I live. But if I die, treat my family with this faithful love, even when the LORD destroys all your enemies from the face of the earth.’ So Jonathan made a solemn pact with David, saying, ‘May the LORD destroy all your enemies!’” (1 Sam 20:14-16 NLT) David’s treatment of Jonathan’s son, Mephibosheth, was a fulfillment of that promise and that pact.

This story about David and Mephibosheth is a wonderful example of how to live graciously. I also want to suggest this morning that it’s a wonderful illustration or analogy of God’s relationship with you and me. The story of David and Mephibosheth is from first to last a story about grace – grace rendered, grace required and grace received. And, in the same way, the story of God and Rick Breusch or God and you is also from first to last a story about grace – grace rendered, grace required and grace received. As we prepare our hearts to gather at the Lord’s Table and receive again these symbols of His grace, I invite you to walk with me through this wonderful story and observe how it helps to tell

the story above all stories – the story of God’s grace to sinful human beings like you and like me. Think with me, first of all, how this story is about ...

GRACE RENDERED

I want you to notice that David rather than Mephibosheth takes the initiative in this relationship. This story of grace begins with David’s questions, “... ‘Is anyone in Saul’s family still alive—anyone to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan’s sake?... If so, I want to show God’s kindness to them.’” (2 Sam 9:1,3 NLT) When David hears about Mephibosheth, we’re told that he went out and got him and brought him to the palace in Jerusalem. What’s the point? The point is David sought out Mephibosheth; Mephibosheth did not seek out David.

In just the same way, God initiates a relationship with you. God sought you out; you did not seek out God. Oh, you might think you made the first move towards God, but you’ll eventually recognize that God was already working in your life perhaps in hidden ways long before you began to pursue Him. If God hadn’t sent Jesus into this world to die and rise again, your only destiny would be slavery to sin in this world and Hell for all eternity. If God hadn’t sent the Holy Spirit to you to convict you of your sin and enable your heart to respond to God’s grace, you would be lost and cut off from God. Jesus recognized fully who took the first step when He said, “‘For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.’” (Luke 19:10 NLT) None of us ever seek God at our own initiative. Grace is all about God taking the first step – taking the initiative – to reach out to us.

Why did David want to show grace to Mephibosheth? For the sake of his great friend, Jonathan. In other words, David wanted to show kindness to Mephibosheth on the basis of his relationship to someone else. He says to Mephibosheth, “‘Don’t be afraid!... I intend to show kindness to you because of my promise to your father, Jonathan....’” (2 Sam 9:7 NLT) Why is that important? It’s clear that David’s kindness towards Mephibosheth wasn’t based on Mephibosheth’s worthiness. David’s grace didn’t depend on who Mephibosheth character. He hadn’t done anything to earn or deserve David’s grace. In fact, David could have felt threatened by Mephibosheth. Yes, he was the son of David’s greatest friend, Jonathan, but he was also the grandson of his greatest enemy, King Saul. Mephibosheth had a claim to the throne. David had a reason to eliminate him. Mephibosheth had nothing David needed, deserved nothing good or gracious from David and could offer nothing to David that David needed then or in the future. From a human perspective, Mephibosheth was more of a potential liability to David than an asset. But David extended grace to Mephibosheth on the basis of someone else – Jonathan.

There’s a wonderful parallel right there in terms of God’s relationship with you. God the Father offers grace to you on the basis of someone else – His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ – who died on the cross for your sins and was raised to life three days later. God’s grace doesn’t rest on any worthiness in you. It doesn’t

depend on your character or reputation. You've done nothing to earn or deserve God's grace. Just like Mephibosheth, you offer nothing to God that He needs; you deserve nothing good or gracious from Him and you can give Him nothing that God needs now or in the future. In fact, God has good reason to eliminate you because you're a sinner. You rebelled against Him by adopting an approach to life that shut Him out. And even though you might be a follower of Jesus now, you still struggle with sin. You still fall short of God's standards both in your attitudes and actions.

So why does God continue to put up with you? Yes, He loves you – that's true. But He continues to extend His grace to you on the basis of someone else – Jesus. Over in the New Testament, we read, "Once we, too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled and became slaves to many lusts and pleasures. Our lives were full of evil and envy, and we hated each other. But—'When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. Because of his grace he declared us righteous and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.'" (Titus 3:3-7 NLT) The story of David and Mephibosheth – and the story of God and you - is about grace rendered. It's also a story about ...

GRACE REQUIRED

Did Mephibosheth need grace? Did he ever! We're told how he lost the use of his legs. "Saul's son Jonathan had a son named Mephibosheth, who was crippled as a child. He was five years old when the report came from Jezreel that Saul and Jonathan had been killed in battle. When the child's nurse heard the news, she picked him up and fled. But as she hurried away, she dropped him, and he became crippled." (2 Sam 4:4 NLT) So, through no fault of his own, Mephibosheth lost the use of his legs at an early age. Then, again, Mephibosheth had every reason to believe that David wanted to kill him. He might well have been in hiding before David reached out to him. Mephibosheth was in a world of hurt – a young man who was in a hopeless and helpless situation. He was caught up in forces and circumstances beyond his control.

Again, Mephibosheth is an illustration of the state of every human being. Just as Mephibosheth was crippled physically, you are crippled spiritually. Sin – this innate spiritual rejection of and rebellion against God has infected all of our attitudes and actions. It's crippled all of us. None of us are able to walk in a way spiritually that honors or pleases the Lord. Whether we're conscious of it or not, sin has made us hostile to God. Just like Mephibosheth hid from David, we hide from God. We're afraid of Him. We think He's out to get us. I was interested to learn that the name Mephibosheth literally means "one who scatters shame" or "a shameful thing." One of the inevitable results of sin in your life and mine is shame, isn't it? Sin creates a vicious cycle in your life. Sin begins with an

attitude or an action of rebellion against God. You insist on living life your way regardless of what God wants. Rebellion results in guilt – you now feel and know that you’re estranged from God. Rebellion leads to shame which is this feeling that you’re a worthless creature not deserving of God’s love or grace.

Ultimately, sin leads to spiritual bondage. You’re stuck in your sins – lying, stealing, lusting, gossiping, coveting, hating, being arrogant, being selfish, being judgmental – whatever. Just like Mephibosheth, you and I are in desperate need of God’s grace. Now, give Mephibosheth credit. It’s clear he recognized his need for grace. “...When he came to David, he bowed low to the ground in deep respect. David said, ‘Greetings, Mephibosheth.’ Mephibosheth replied, ‘I am your servant.’... Mephibosheth bowed respectfully and exclaimed, ‘Who is your servant, that you should show such kindness to a dead dog like me?’” (2 Sam 9:6, 8 NLT) Mephibosheth knew he didn’t deserve David’s kindness. All he could do was accept David’s grace with sincere gratitude.

It’s important to remember that you don’t have any claim on the grace of God either. You don’t have any right to it. You can’t put the word “grace” and “deserve” together. If something is in anyway deserved, it’s not longer grace. Grace is getting something you don’t deserve. You didn’t earn it through good behavior. You didn’t buy it or pay for it. You just receive it with the same attitude you see in Mephibosheth: humility and gratitude. That’s how you can spot someone who has truly experienced God’s grace. Grace can never make you proud or arrogant. Grace never portrays an attitude that suggests, “Well, God just ought to love me because I’m so wonderful. God ought to forgive my sins because I’m such a nice person. God ought to let me into Heaven because I’m such a moral person. The Bible says, “... ‘God opposes the proud but favors the humble.’” (1 Pt 5:5 NLT)

Keeping an attitude of perpetual humility and gratitude is by no means automatic. Even followers of Jesus can get bored with “God stuff”, become indifferent to His church, drift away from any time of meaningful prayer or interaction with God’s Word or start to live lives dominated by sinful attitudes and actions. What about you this morning? You received Jesus as your Savior. You were baptized – maybe even in this very church. But do the things of God, and the worship of God, and the people of God and the mission of God produce a surge of excitement or a yawn of boredom? The evidence of grace received can never look bored, or proud or entitled. A true experience of grace shows itself in a perpetual, eternal attitude of humility and gratitude. Is that how it is with you and God? Are you, like Mephibosheth, profoundly, deeply and perpetually humble and thankful? The story of David and Mephibosheth – and the story of God and you – is about grace rendered and grace required. It’s also a story about...

GRACE RECEIVED

How did David's grace change Mephibosheth's life? Well, in some of the same ways that God's grace changes your life. First of all, Mephibosheth received life. David had the power to kill him. Instead, David offered him not only his life, but an exalted life – a life lived with King David himself. God would be entirely just in sending you away to an eternity in Hell for your sins against Him. But, instead, God offers you an exalted life - a life beyond your imagination - with the King of kings and Lord of lords forever and ever. The evidence of grace received is life.

Secondly, Mephibosheth received peace. He was hiding from David in fear for his life. He probably thought that he was in mortal danger from the most powerful man in the country. What's the first thing David says to Mephibosheth? "Don't be afraid!..." (2 Sam 9:7 NLT) Are you afraid? Is there something that you fear intensely and you know exactly what it is this morning? Or, instead, do you have this kind of anonymous anxiety clinging to the edges of your life robbing you of peace? What does the Bible say about God, grace and peace? "Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us." (Rom 5:1 NLT) It also says, "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus." (Ph 4:6-7 NLT) The evidence of grace received is peace.

Thirdly, Mephibosheth received an inheritance. David gave him all the property that belonged to King Saul and Jonathan. He ordered Ziba, Saul's servant, to farm the land so that Mephibosheth would always have provision for the future. That sounds wonderfully gracious, but David was determined to be in even more gracious. David says to Mephibosheth, "... 'I will give you all the property that once belonged to your grandfather Saul and you will eat here with me at the king's table!'" (2 Sam 9:7 NLT) What an honor! Mephibosheth was invited to have constant access to and fellowship with the king! But it indicated even more than having a place of honor. The text says, "... And from that time on, Mephibosheth ate regularly at David's table, like one of the king's own sons." (2 Sam 9:11 NLT) It was as if David adopted Mephibosheth into his own family. He treated him like his own son. Mephibosheth enjoyed an incredible inheritance. He was provided for by the king, invited to enjoy fellowship with the king and he became part of the king's family. Here's what the Bible says about God's grace and you. "And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory...." (Rom 8:17 NLT) You've been given an inheritance. The King of kings promises to provide for you. The King of kings invites you to enjoy fellowship with Him. The King of kings invites you to become part of His family. The evidence of grace received is an inheritance.

As you know, I like to end Sunday's messages with a story of some kind. Today I want to close with another story about David and Mephibosheth that builds on the story we've considered today. It reveals what happens when grace has done

its good work in a heart and a life. Years passed with David as the king of Israel. Another great crisis entered David's life when his son, Absalom – dynamic, charismatic, handsome Absalom – tried to remove his father, David, as king. He almost succeeded. David had to flee Jerusalem. On the way out of the city, David meets up with Ziba, Mephibosheth's servant. Mephibosheth was not with him and David asked Ziba why. Ziba said, "He stayed in Jerusalem. He thinks there's a chance that the people of Israel will make him king since he's Saul's grandson." Ziba was lying, but David foolishly believed him without checking out the facts. Right then and there, he gave all of Mephibosheth's property to Ziba. Well, David finally prevailed over his son, Absalom, and he returned to Jerusalem to resume his reign as king of Israel.

In 2 Samuel 19 we have the story of David's encounter with Mephibosheth upon returning to Jerusalem after this horrific crisis with Absalom. Let's read verses verse 24 - 30. I don't know why David only returned half of Mephibosheth's property and let Ziba retain the other half. Some suggest that he did that to test Mephibosheth's sincerity. But the point is found there in verse 30 where Mephibosheth says, "... 'Let him take everything, now that my lord the king has arrived home safely.'" Mephibosheth had come to love David for who David was not for what David had given him or what he could get out of David. Mephibosheth just wanted to be with David. Grace had done its good work in Mephibosheth's heart and life. Do you know how you can tell if God's grace has done its work in your heart and life? When grace has been fully received and experienced, you want God simply for who He is even more than for what God has given you or what you can get out of God. Only God satisfies your heart.

I love how the story of David and Mephibosheth ends there in 2 Samuel 9:13, "And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king's table..." He always ate at the king's table. This morning you're invited to eat at the King's table, too. Here are the symbols of His grace – His body broken for you; His blood shed for you. Come and get filled up again this morning – filled up with God's kindness, filled up with God's love, filled up with God's grace. Grace rendered. Grace required. Grace received. Join me at the King's table!