

# Lecture 8 — Mephibosheth: or, A good finish.

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*2 Samuel 4: 4, 9; 2 Samuel 16: 1-4; 2 Samuel 19: 24-30.*

## **Young Men of Scripture.**

### **Nine addresses to young men.**

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*1911. Seventh Edition. Twenty-second Thousand.*

The story of Mephibosheth is to me exceedingly interesting, because it shows in a picture what man is in his natural ruined state, and how the grace of God can meet a man where he is, and what the effect of that grace will be upon the heart that has tasted it. The first thing we get in his history is when Mephibosheth was a child of five. Tidings come from Jezreel of the death of Saul and Jonathan His grandfather and father were ignominiously slain on the mountains of Gilboa by the Philistines, and when the tidings came, "his nurse took him up, and fled: and it came to pass, as she made haste to flee, that he fell, and became lame" (2 Sam. 4: 4).

Why did she fly? Why did that nurse take up that child of five years old, and fly? She reasoned exactly in the same way as man does about God. She reasoned from the conduct of Saul to David, as to what the conduct of David would be to the posterity, the offspring, of Saul. We have seen, on a previous night, how Saul had persecuted David, how he had hunted him like a partridge on the mountains. She knew that Saul hated David. She inferred that David would hate Saul, and that he would hate all the offspring of Saul. She argued, — Here is the real heir to the throne: Saul is gone, and Jonathan is dead. The direct heir to Saul's throne is this child, Mephibosheth; and now David will certainly get to the throne, for all Israel knows that David is marked out for the throne by God; he will be sure to cut off Saul's posterity; but I will save this child from his vengeance. She took him from wrath, as she supposed, and in her haste she dropped him. He was injured, and crippled for life.

Man also is a cripple before God. Man has got away from God — every man! Adam first of all fell, and in his fall the whole of his family have got into a condition of distance from God. You may turn and say to me, "We admit that we are sinners at a distance from God, but we could not help being born sinners." I allow that, but there is now no reason why you should *remain* at a distance from God. If you have not yet been converted, and led to know God as your Saviour, the reason is very simple. You prefer to remain where you are.

Turn to the next passage in Mephibosheth's history, and read the 9th of 2nd Samuel, "And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for

Jonathan's sake?" (2 Sam. 9: 1) Here we shall find that Mephibosheth is not only grown, but has a child. I don't suppose I shall go very far wrong in saying that at this time Mephibosheth must have been a man of between twenty and thirty years. And what has he done? He has *remained away* from David. But why did he not go up to David? He was afraid. He looked upon David in the same way as his nurse did, as the hereditary foe of his family. It is so with us. We have all sinned, and are away from God; and our hearts being deeply alienated from God, every man has the thought — God is against me. Lie! Lie of Satan! Foul lie of hell! God is not against man. He is for man.

It is man who is against God. It is you and I who are by nature against God. We have been opposed to God, and not God opposed to us. No, my friends, the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ clearly solves this question. "If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all" (Rom. 8: 31, 32), conclusively proves that God is for us. He is not opposed to man. We sometimes hear of God being reconciled to man. Scripture does not so speak. "And you, that were sometime alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled" (Cor. 1: 21). It is man who is at a distance from God, and needs reconciliation. It is your heart and mine that are at a distance from God; but now God's love has effected reconciliation in the case of every believer in Jesus! God was offended at man's sin, but atonement has been made by Jesus' death. God has received the atonement that Jesus has made, and man has to receive the reconciliation. "For if, when we were enemies, we were *reconciled* to God by the death of his Son; much more, *being reconciled*, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation" (Rom. 5: 10, 11). What reconciles the heart of man to God? It is the thought — God loved me, when I did not love Him; Jesus died for me, when I did not care for Him.

This ninth chapter brings us to a point of immense interest in Mephibosheth's history, where he gets really to know the heart of David. The kingdom is established. David is crowned. His foes have been put down. He is established on the throne, and in the calm quiet of the kingdom he is able to say, "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" What a beautiful picture of the goodness of God! What a beautiful illustration of the grace of God at this very hour! Why have we this meeting in this hall tonight? I believe that this meeting found its origin in heaven. It was prompted by God, and I hear His voice saying, as it were, "Is there yet any left of the lost race of Adam, that I may show him kindness for Jesus' sake?" Is there an unsaved man — is there a lost man — is there an unpardoned man, within these walls tonight? The voice of God is heard saying, in His grace, "I will show him kindness for Jesus' sake;" for observe, God has righteous ground for dealing with sinners thus. Man has deeply sinned; but before the day of God's righteous judgment, His own blessed Son has entered the scene where man has sinned, and, dying for the sinner, has made atonement to God for his sins, so that God may bless in righteousness the one who believes in Jesus. Is there yet any left of the house of Adam, that God may show kindness to him tonight? To the foe, to the enemy, to the opponent, is this divine, this sovereign grace extended. God' loves his enemies. He has loved us when we did not love Him. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3: 16).

Ziba, a servant of the house of Saul, could give useful witness in the case before us. The king says to him, "Art thou Ziba?" and he said, "Thy servant is he." Every word has a meaning in Scripture, and this man's name means "Plantation," and you find what he was afterwards. He was a man who was always looking after himself — who, as the saying goes, looked after the main chance, and he did so as long as he could. He gives witness of one to whom David may show kindness. The king says, "Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God unto him?" (ver. 3.) That is a remarkable word, "the kindness of God." A beautiful word! David looks around him, and says, "My heart is full of benevolence. Is there yet any left of the house of my foe? is there left any descendant of the man who hunted me, and sought me that he might slay me, and thrice threw javelins at me? is there left any that — I may wreak my vengeance upon him? ah! no — that I may show the kindness of God unto him." Beautiful word!

You may say to me, "What is the kindness of God?" We have the very expression used in the New Testament. We are left in no doubt as to what the kindness of God is. In writing to Titus, the apostle Paul says: "For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3: 3-7). Wonderful words! The kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man is shown in saving us. I don't deny that God is good, and that He sends His rain on the just and the unjust, and causes His sun to shine on the evil, as well as on the good; but that is only in the way of providence. Where the real kindness and love of God come out, is in the giving of His own blessed Son, and that Son dying on the tree — the just for the unjust. The kindness of God! Do you know it? Have you tasted it? Ah! my friend, are you still a stranger to this kindness of God? What is it? say you. It is the knowledge of salvation, — it is the knowledge of eternal life, — it is the knowledge of God as a Father, — and it is the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour. It is "The kindness of God our Saviour," — not God our judge. We all thought about God as a judge. There is not one here, if he is honest, but will confess that his primary thought was that, God was a judge. "God our Saviour," I read here. "After that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done," — that is, your works and mine are set aside, — "but according to his mercy *he saved us*." Who in this company tonight can really say, I am saved? If you are not, may God help you to believe the Gospel, and see the truth. Then will you be able to say, I know the kindness of God; He has saved me this night by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Just as David was in quest of some of Saul's household to bless them, so God is in quest of man to bless him. If there be only one young man in this hall tonight unsaved, then I have a message from God to him. I have a message from the God of love, and that message is a message of kindness. The great point is to find the man for whom the message is designed. Ziba indicated the man in David's day. He said, "Jonathan hath yet a son, *who is lame on his feet*." He was a cripple. You could not get much out of a man lame on his feet. What would be the use of a man lame on his feet running in a race? What progress could a man lame on his feet make in climbing a mountain. Do you suppose you will find your way into heavenly glory lame on your feet. No!

Now, tell me, ye who are lame on your feet, would you not like to know Jesus tonight? Would you not like to have this blessed Saviour as yours? Alas! I am lame on my feet, do you reply? True, but it is not by works of righteousness that we have done, but according to His mercy that God saves us. If you are ever going to be saved, how do you suppose it will be effected? There was a young man in this hall last Sunday evening. Another young man asked him, "Are you a Christian?" "No, but I think it is time to become a Christian;" and then he added, as though that would conclude the matter, and save him, "I think I will join the Christian Association." Ah! is it by your own will, and jumping into the company of other people, that you hope to become a Christian? That is not the way at all. The way to become a Christian, is to know Christ. The man who is really a Christian has been brought to see that he is a sinner, — a ruined, lost, undone sinner; and then, when oppressed by the sense of his distance, he hears and believes the Gospel. By the Word of God he is brought to have to do with God, just as you will see Mephibosheth is here brought to David. David learns of his existence, and of his condition. He next asks, Where is he? "Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lo-debar." That was a long way off Mephibosheth lived scores of miles away from Jerusalem. So did you and I live in "a far country," like the prodigal son. That is where most men spend a good deal of their time. I admit that Lo-debar means "with pasture"; but do you think the pasture of Lo-debar could be equal to what was then in the king's palace? Do you think "the husks that the swine did eat" are to be compared with "the fatted calf" of the father's house? Do you think the pleasures of this world are to be compared with the blessedness of knowing the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour, and God as your Father? I assure you I tried well the pleasures of sin, but they did not satisfy. Nothing will satisfy your heart but the knowledge of God, and Him you may only know in the person of His Son — the Lord Jesus Christ. I grant that you are at a distance; but as the eye of the father was upon the son when he was "a great way off," so is the eye of God upon each one here this evening.

"And king David sent, and fetched him out of the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, from Lo-debar." Sent and fetched him! Oh, what grace! No sooner does he know all about him than forsooth he must send and fetch him. I think I see the scene at that moment, when this fugitive — perhaps in the midst of his daily avocations — hears that a message from the king, borne by a herald with the king's apparel, has arrived. He is arrested. "You are Mephibosheth?" says the messenger. "I am." "I have a message for you." "For me?" says Mephibosheth. "From whom?" "King David!" "And what is the message?" asks the trembling young man. "He has sent me to bring you from the spot where you are right up to Jerusalem — to his very presence." I believe conscience began to work, and Mephibosheth would no doubt ask himself, "What does he want? What will he do with me?"

Just as David's messenger approached Mephibosheth, so am I here tonight from heaven to call you. I am a messenger of God from glory to every unsaved man in this hall. "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5: 20). What do I want? I want you for Christ. I want your heart for Jesus! I want you to be brought to the Saviour! Young man! come to the Lord! Turn this night, and know that blessed Saviour! Though you are yet in your sins, and at a distance from God, in an unregenerate condition, hear the Gospel, and turn to know the blessed Saviour in glory. God's message bids you come to Him. I do not doubt that when Mephibosheth heard the message, the query would arise in his mind, "How can I go?" I doubt not that David's messenger

had beasts of burden to bring him from the far country to the king's presence. So it is tonight. What is it that brings a man to God? It is always the Word of God applied by the Holy Spirit. It is invariably some bit of Scripture — perhaps only one word — that comes into a man's mind, and turns him to God. God is sovereign in His grace. A young man passed a hall where there was preaching going on, in a careless, godless frame of mind. The door was on the swing, and he looked in. All he heard the preacher say was, "Turn or burn! turn or burn!" He was converted! A man, one Sunday evening, committed burglary, and was surprised by the police in the act. He fled, and was pursued. As he fled from the officers of the law, he turned a corner where stood a mission hall. Thinking to escape detection by this act, he entered the preaching place, — an unlikely place, you would think, for a godless thief! The preacher at that moment gave out his text, "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" (Ps. 139: 7). He escaped the policeman, but he did not escape God. He was convicted of his sin, and, thank God! it ended in his conversion. God delights, in grace, to meet a man where he is in his sin. The call to you tonight is to know God. And I want you to make up your mind.

"Now when Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face and did reverence." It was a wonderful moment when he got into David's presence. He would recollect how he had acted. His own conscience would say, You kept up the grudge, you know. You kept out of David's presence; you never came to Jerusalem; you never helped to crown him. Your voice was not heard in that shout, "God save the king!" on the day of the coronation. Oh, no! He had kept far away, and he had reasoned thus: My grandfather hated David, David will hate me. I must keep away as far as possible from him. And you reason: I have sinned; God hates sin, therefore He must hate me. I will keep away as far from Him as I can.

Stop! That is an immense mistake. What you want is to come near to Him. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1: 18). Mephibosheth gets into David's presence, and makes obeisance. He falls down upon his face. His conscience is in the presence of the king, and it is a wonderful moment when the conscience gets into the presence of God. "And David said, Mephibosheth," — he calls him by his name. I think he was a little startled, but he replies, "Behold thy servant!" He would take the place of a servant. "And David said unto him, 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" (ver. 7). What a beautiful word to a troubled soul! "Fear not!" It is God's lovely word of encouragement to the anxious soul. Fear not! Art thou troubled? Art thou anxious? Art thou afraid to draw near to God? What does He say? "Fear not!" That is the word of the Lord. "I will show thee kindness for Jesus' sake." Observe, that God has now righteous ground for His action. God does not come down and bless man at the expense of His own character or righteousness. No; sin has been demonstrated at, and has been judged on, the cross, where the sinless Saviour died for the guilty sinner; and now, you observe God in righteousness is able to come out and bless man. "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.*"

In effect David says: I shall bring you into my house, and you shall have a son's place. At this unfolding of grace, Mephibosheth bowed himself, and said, "What is thy servant, that thou

shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?" I think that is a beautiful point. It pictures the real state of the soul that gets into the presence of God with a true estimate of what it is in His sight. Observe he calls himself "a dead dog." He humbles himself under the sense of his own actions, and the treatment he has given to David. I admit it was the treatment of indifference. Mephibosheth's had not been a course of open opposition like that of Saul. It had been cold distrust, and contemptuous indifference, and that is perhaps your position. It has not perhaps been open, blasphemous opposition to the Lord. What has it been? Cold, and, more or less, contemptuous indifference to Jesus. Mephibosheth had a deep sense of what his own behaviour had been, and judged it unsparingly.

"Then the king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said unto him, I have given unto thy master's son all that pertained to Saul, and to all his house. Thou therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants, shall till the land for him; and thou shalt bring in the fruits, that thy master's son may have food to eat. But Mephibosheth, thy master's son, *shall eat bread alway at my table;*" and then very strikingly is added, "Now Ziba had fifteen sons, and twenty servants" (ver. 10). I confess, when reading this, I often wondered why the Spirit of God should record that Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants, and it was a long time before I saw the point. It is very simple, however. It just shows how grace delights to contribute to the blessing of its object, and nothing is too much to devote to it. Here was David saying to Ziba, You and all your family must serve Mephibosheth; he is the object of my grace. And that is what God does. He saves and blesses a man out and out. He brings him to know Himself, and puts everything at his disposal. Everything is to contribute to his blessing. God loves us, and delights to bless us, and will turn everything to our advantage. The fifteen sons and twenty servants simply tell us that there is no limit to God's lavish supply to those whom His grace has blessed.

"Then said Ziba unto the king, According to all that my lord the king hath commanded his servant, so shall thy servant do. As for Mephibosheth, said the king, he shall eat at my table, *as one of the king's sons*" (ver. 11). He was to be a son, not a stranger. He goes into David's house as a son, and that is what the Gospel does for the sinner. It makes him a son. Hitherto the servant of sin, and the servant of Satan, the moment the Gospel meets and blesses him, he becomes a son of God. "Ye are all the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3: 26). When the prodigal son had spent his all in the far country, the thought crossed his mind, "I will arise, and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." But observe that he did not say that. When the father saw him a great way off, he ran to meet him, and fell on his neck and kissed him. He treated him like a son, not as a servant. Ah! my dear friend, if God meets you, and blesses you, He gives you the place of a son, and not that of a servant. When he came to the father, he found nothing but love — nothing but goodness. How touching the description: "But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him." And the son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son;" but he says nothing about being made a hired servant.

What did the father say? "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to

be merry" (Luke 15: 18-24). So is it here. "Mephibosheth shall eat at my table *as one of the king's SONS*," says David. And every man here may so be blessed. We are forgiven our sins the moment there is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and at that moment we become the children of God, by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1: 11, 12).

But you might say to me, Can I receive Christ? You may; and if you are wise, you will do so at once.

And what became of Mephibosheth? He "dwelt in Jerusalem; for he did eat continually at the king's table: and was lame on both his feet" (ver. 13). He dwelt in the place of royal grace, and how did he fare there? Like a king's son. Had you seen him, he would have on the robe of a king's son. If you had gone to the table of David, whom would you have seen there at every meal? Mephibosheth! He was quite at home, quite at ease; grace had won his heart. He is the figure of the Christian who knows that he is a Christian, who, as a simple believer, knows the joy which the Lord gives him. He seizes by faith what love provides, and enjoys it He dwelt in Jerusalem. Why? "For he did eat *continually* at the king's table." He, nevertheless, "was lame on both his feet." He was not altered in himself; his position was altered. And we, if we come to Christ, are we altered? No. We are ourselves still. We remain the same as before we received Jesus. We are not changed in ourselves, nor improved in our old nature, but we have a new life, with new joys, and a new object, Christ Himself.

If we receive Jesus, and eat at the Father's table, and take the place of being His sons, we have to learn to be faithful, and that lesson Mephibosheth teaches us, too, beautifully. David lost his throne soon after Mephibosheth was received, through the conspiracy of Absalom, and had to fly from Jerusalem, and he naturally expected that Mephibosheth would be true to him and accompany him. So in the same way the Lord Jesus counts upon the fealty of your heart and mine, my dear young fellow-Christian.

If you will turn over to 2 Sam. 16: 1-4, you will see this brought out. Mephibosheth does not appear, but up comes Ziba with "two asses saddled, and upon them two hundred loaves of bread, and an hundred bunches of raisins, and an hundred of summer fruits, and a bottle of wine." The king asks him, "What meanest thou by these?" And Ziba said he had prepared these for the king's household. Where is Mephibosheth? asked David. Oh! said Ziba, "He abideth at Jerusalem; for he said, Today shall the house of Israel restore me the, kingdom of my father." That was a dreadful lie of Ziba's, but David was deceived, and he says, "Behold thine are all that pertained unto Mephibosheth." It is very easy to blackball a Christian. It is very easy for one young man to tell lies on another, but the truth will all come out.

David's kingdom is restored to him in 2 Samuel 19, and he returns to Jerusalem. When he comes back, who is the first person to come out and meet him? Listen, it is very instructive to me: "And Mephibosheth, the son of Saul, came down to meet the king, and 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" (2 Sam. 19: 24). He was a mourner. His heart was as true as steel to David. Jerusalem had been given up to merriment, and making much of Absalom. The rebels

were drinking wine, and making feasts; but Mephibosheth was true to the rejected king, just so is it now. The world is going on in its carelessness, forgetful of Jesus, and hurrying to eternal judgment. What is the real Christian doing? Standing for Christ. Are you standing for Christ? Do you think Edinburgh knows you as a man of God — as a down right, backbone Christian — a man who stands for the Lord? That is the question. Mephibosheth was well known in Jerusalem as true to the rejected king.

He stood alone apparently, but he stood. He had "no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness" (Eph. 5: 11). His heart was with his master in rejection. His heart was true to his absent lord. Now the king asks him, "Why wentest thou not with me, Mephibosheth?" and he answered, "My lord, O king, my servant deceived me, for thy servant said, I will saddle me an ass that I may ride thereon, and go to the king, because thy servant is lame, and he hath slandered thy servant unto my lord the king" (vers. 26, 27). He it was who got ready, and prepared the bread and fruit and wine, to meet the king; but Ziba, rogue that he was, seized the laden asses, and rode off to the king, and slandered his master. David was deceived, but you can't deceive Christ. There is no deceiving Him. I have had many a thing said about me during these three and thirty years that I have been a Christian, but I don't care what people say. They can't deceive my Master. He knows the truth, and that is the great thing.

Rather taken aback by learning the true state of affairs, David says, "I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land. And Mephibosheth said, Yea, *let him take it all*, for as much as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own land" (vers. 29, 30). I don't care about the land, says Mephibosheth. That was all Ziba cared for. He wanted the earth. Like the worldly Christian, he wants things on earth. Mephibosheth says, I don't want the land, I wanted you. I wanted your presence, I wanted to be for you, and with you.

I call this a grand finish — a fine finish. Don't you? Here is a man true as steel — a downright, backbone disciple — a man whom you can't shunt. He won't yield. His heart is for his lord. He is for his lord, and he wants his lord only. I think Mephibosheth was a beautiful character. He had tasted grace, and afterwards was faithful. Do you think our Lord does not look for us to be true and faithful? If we are saying, I will follow Christ, and at the same time hugging the world — with one arm holding the world, and with the other trying to hold Christ — do you think that will do? No! That is a double-minded man, and "a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways" (James 1: 8). There are a good many people professing to be Christians, but they have too much of Christ to enjoy the world, and too much of the world to enjoy Christ, or to be able to do any real service for Him in the world. They are the people whom nobody respects; they are the people without a backbone. God save you from being a Christian of that stamp! I would like you to be a living, burning witness for Christ — the sort of person concerning whom it will be said, "Ah! if you get near to him, he will be sure to speak to you about Christ." Seek a man who, to be like the apostle Paul, can say, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."

How beautifully does the curtain drop upon Mephibosheth! I do not care for the land, he says; I did not want the land; but I wanted your presence, O David! I don't think anything could be more grateful or sweet to the heart of David. And so is it with the Lord Jesus. He looks for our affections and our faithfulness to Him; and should that faithfulness lead to persecution and loss

for His name, never mind, for He says to all who suffer for Him, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Rev. 2: 10).