

showing kindness to a miserable cripple who was at enmity with him. Even so, the Bible says, “The carnal mind is enmity against God” (*Rom 8:7*). “We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away” (*Isaiah 64:6*).

What possible good can a sinner do for the King of glory? add to his glory? Did Mephibosheth add to David’s glory? No! but the kindness and compassion of the king was seen in Mephibosheth; even as God’s mercy and grace is seen in saving lost sinners. We don’t add to his glory; but in our salvation, his glory is put on display for all to see. Our God is and always has been all glorious. When a sinner is saved, it only shows forth what has always been true—“Blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise” (*Neh 9:5*). His mercy is manifested in the miserable! His grace is displayed in the guilty!

What does the Name Mephibosheth Mean?

“Mephibosheth” means “a shameful thing.” Shameful—nothing of which to boast, without any redeeming traits. Shameful—nothing to do but hide his face in shame because his kinsman played the fool and revolted against God’s anointed. To be a “sinner” is a shameful thing! “The LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me...From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores” (*Isaiah 1:2,6*). Modern religion will not hear of it! But God’s Word declares it. Have you ever seen yourself as a shameful thing? Jesus said, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (*Mat 9:13*).

What was Mephibosheth?

Mephibosheth was a cripple—“He fell, and became lame” (*2 Sam 4:4*)—“lame on both his feet,” unable to run or even walk. This is a picture of us! We became lame through a fall in Adam! We are unable to come to God of our own accord, and in our own good time. Sinners are “without strength” (*Rom 5:6*)—helpless before God, spiritual cripples! We don’t have the ability to rise up and come to Christ when we get ready. Those with such an attitude perish in their foolish pride. Strength must be given from above—Jesus said, “*No man can* come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father” (*John 6:65*).

Where was Mephibosheth?

Mephibosheth was in a place called Lodebar. “Lodebar” means “the place of no pasture.” Mephibosheth lived in a place of no sustenance, no food, and no satisfaction. This world and all that it has to offer is but a dry and barren land for the soul of man. He cannot find true peace, true rest, or true happiness in the perishing things of this life. “The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest,

whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked” (*Isaiah 57:20-21*). Pleasure, fame, and fortune leave but an aching void in the heart of man. Regardless of how much of this world’s goods you may accumulate, your soul will still be filled with nothing but emptiness. Like the Prodigal who “filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat”—he still cried out, “I perish with hunger!” (*Luke 15:16-17*). This world is Lodebar—“the place of no pasture.” Our jobs, our families, our recreation, our riches, cannot satisfy the longing within. We were made for God, and we’ll know no rest, and no peace, till we rest in God. Jesus said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest...ye shall find rest unto your souls” (*Mat 11:28-29*).

What was the Motive Behind David’s Action?

We know that it couldn’t have been anything in Mephibosheth. He was a miserable cripple, and an enemy of the king. What then moved the heart of king David? three very important words found in our text—“for Jonathan’s sake” (*vv 1,7*). It was something entirely outside of Mephibosheth! David had made a covenant with Jonathan, whom he loved, to show kindness to his house (*1 Sam 20:15-17*). It was on the basis of a covenant, a promise, that king David sent and fetched this helpless cripple from his sad estate.

Why does God the Father show mercy upon helpless sinners? for the sake of his only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Why does he forgive sinners? “God, *for Christ’s sake*, hath forgiven you” (*Eph 4:32*). Throughout all this beautiful story, Mephibosheth was not the one who was foremost in the mind of the king, *Jonathan was!* King David didn’t rescue Mephibosheth merely to improve his state, but rather he brought this miserable cripple into his palace that he might glorify Jonathan; and by this, he let all Israel know just how much he loved Jonathan, and how dear he was to the heart of the king.

Even so is Christ dear to the heart of the Father! God doesn’t rescue sinners merely to keep them out of hell. He rescues sinners to magnify Christ! and put on display just how much he loves his Son! Undone and ungodly wretches are saved that Jesus might be glorified! Mephibosheth is no good! But he was fetched out of his miserable state all the way into the palace of the king, for no other reason, than that Jonathan might be magnified.

What Did David Do?

Did David send a message that if Mephibosheth would “do his part,” mercy would be his? Did he send crutches with a word that if he could just get to Jerusalem, everything would be OK? No. “He sent and fetched him!” What is the popular evangelistic message of today?—“God has done all he can, and now it’s all up to you. He sent his Son to die; the sin-debt has been paid; he’s done his part, and

now you must do yours!” We need to study the parable of the “Great Supper” again (*Luke 14:16-24*). “They *all* with one consent began to make excuse!” (*v 18*). All men by nature hold God’s Supper in contempt by offering worthless, flimsy excuses. The Holy Spirit must “*compel*” sinners “to come in!” (*v 23*). “There is none that seeketh after God...the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (*Rom 3:11; 1 Cor 2:14*). The Good Shepherd goes out to “fetch” the lost sheep (*Luke 15*). Why? because *they’re lost!* Lost means lost! They need to be found! “The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost!” (*Luke 19:10; see 2 Cor 4:3,4*). “Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth, and *causest* to approach unto thee” (*Psal 65:4*). If it were not for God’s “fetching grace,” where would we be? “David sent and fetched him!”

What is Grace?

Grace is pure charity exercised sovereignly and spontaneously, attracted by nothing praiseworthy in its objects. It is given to sinners who have *no merit* whatsoever—yea, to those who are full of *demerit*. The sinner’s condition is desperate to the last degree; it’s a wonder he’s not already in hell. Grace is the sinner’s last and only hope, and being pure charity, God is free to give it, or to withhold it (*Rom 9:15*).

What Happened when the Cripple Met the King?

Mephibosheth knew his life hung on the mercy of the king. He wasn’t prancing down the church aisle to some fancy evangelist’s “first-time decision.” No! “He fell on his face, and did reverence!” (*v 6*). There are multitudes supposedly “getting saved” today who know nothing of the humility and reverence that accompanies true conversion. The Lord Jesus Christ is not at the front of a church; he’s seated on the throne of all power!—“KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS” (*Rev 17:14; 19:16*)—and he bids sinners, “Come unto ME.” You try to get into the presence of a king without bending those knees—you’ll never make it!

Look at Mephibosheth’s response when David spoke to him—“What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?” (*v 8*). That doesn’t paint too beautiful a picture of a sinner in God’s holy sight. Do you really think you deserve God’s mercy? Think again. “There is none righteous, no, not one” (*Rom 3:10*). God has mercy on whom he will (*Rom 9:18*). Be wise. Humble yourself before the Lord. Cast away your foolish pride. Be done with your high esteem and all those good thoughts of yourself. “There’s none that doeth good, no, not one” (*Rom 3:12*). Admit that you’re just what God says you are—“a shameful thing” and bow before the Lord your God. He’s promised, “To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word” (*Isaiah 66:2*).☐

—Adapted from the writings of Jack Shanks

Who Accepts Whom?

Are you a Christian? There are many people who confidently respond to this question: “Of course I am; I accepted Christ a long time ago.” Sad to say, this feather-light response is all too often heard in our day. The problem is not so much that what people say is wrong, as that they fail to say more.

Modern methods of evangelism have produced untold numbers of “professing” Christians who talk as if becoming a Christian were something of their own doing. It goes something like this: “God has done all he can do. The next move (the really decisive one) is up to you. Heaven or hell—the choice is yours.” By thus “accepting” Christ, man virtually becomes his own savior. His eternal destiny is in his own hands. He determines if he’s going to be saved. And he determines when and where he’s going to be saved. God is reduced to a mere spectator.

Our present-day situation was well summarized by Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) when he said:

Sometimes we are inclined to think that a very great portion of modern revivalism has been more of a curse than a blessing, because it has led thousands to a kind of peace before they have known their misery; restoring the prodigal to the Father’s house, and never making him say, “Father, I have sinned.” How can he be healed who is not sick? or he be satisfied with the bread of life who is not hungry? The old-fashioned sense of sin is despised, and consequently a religion is run up before the foundations are dug out. Everything in this age is shallow. Deep-sea fishing is almost an extinct business so far as men’s souls are concerned. The consequence is that men leap into religion, and then leap out again. Unhumbled they came to the church, unhumbled they remained in it, and unhumbled they go from it.

You see, the reason people fail to say more that should be said, is because the “gospel” that they’ve always heard has failed to say enough in the first place.

Today, many pulpits proclaim a God who is trying, in a largely unsuccessful way, to make himself acceptable to man. In the interests of simplicity, the gospel has been over-reduced to the point of being trivialized. But if a little truth is presented as if it were the whole truth, the result will be confusion at best, and deception at worst. When Satan lured Eve with the original temptation, some of what he said was true (*see Gen 3:5 & 3:22*). Partial truth can be more dangerous than total lies! Let us therefore take a look at the “other half” of the gospel, which we cannot afford to omit.

Fetching Grace

“Then king David sent, and fetched him” (2 Samuel 9:5)

What a splendid truth is taught here in God’s Word! *Fetching grace!* This entire chapter of 2 Samuel 9 is a glorious picture of God’s “fetching grace” in his dealing with lost sinners. David sent and “fetched” Mephibosheth! King David pictures God the Father upon his throne who shows mercy to Mephibosheth, who pictures a sinner. Jonathan pictures the Lord Jesus, and Ziba portrays the Holy Spirit. King Saul became an enemy of David. Mephibosheth is Saul’s grandson. As Adam became an enemy of God, even so all of us are his grandsons. The Old Testament is full of pictures of God’s salvation. What can we learn from this picture?

Who Took the Initiative?

Mephibosheth never made a move toward David. In fact, he was hiding from David as his enemy (2Sam 4:4). Even so, Adam “hid from the presence of the LORD” (Gen 3:8). Why? because sin brought guilt into his soul and broke his fellowship with God (see Isaiah 59:2). He now had a dread of God. Spiritually he died, as God had threatened, “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen 2:17). So it is with all of his descendants—we’re born as guilty sinners “alienated from the life of God...dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1; 4:18). “Wherefore as by one man [Adam] sin entered into the world and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom 5:12).

When king Saul became David’s enemy, Mephibosheth, Saul’s grandson, died as far as any friendship with David was concerned. David must himself take the initiative in this story of God’s grace. Even as God took the initiative in the Garden to seek out our father Adam (Gen 3:8-9). That’s how it is with all of us by nature—“All we like sheep have gone astray” (Isaiah 53:6)—the Good Shepherd must seek his sheep (Luke 15:4-7; 19:10; John 10:11,16). Charles Spurgeon said, “You once show me a lost sheep seeking the shepherd, and then I’ll believe that a depraved sinner seeks God without first God finding the sinner.” Sinners do find Christ, but only after they’re found of the Lord (John 1:43-45). “David sent and fetched him.”

Who was the Object of David’s Quest?

It would seem that for David to do this, Mephibosheth must have been a friend, someone who could benefit David by promoting his cause, or defending his honour? On the contrary! He was an immediate descendant of David’s worst enemy! The king could gain nothing by

The true gospel of Jesus Christ is *God-centered*, not man-centered. We were created for *his* pleasure, not vice versa (Rev 4:11). Through Adam, sin entered this world and has entirely corrupted the heart and nature of every man. Thus we’re separated from God by an infinite span. God’s holiness and justice demand that our sin be punished. If your sin is not ultimately punished, God is no longer holy; and if he’s not holy, he’s not God at all.

In our sinful state, we’re unable to pay for our sins, change ourselves, or make peace with God. We’re unacceptable to him. “God accepteth no man’s person” (Gal 2:6). If left to our sinful selves, we’re all headed for eternal damnation. God, who is infinitely holy, will justly pour out his righteous wrath upon us. Our only hope is that someone greater than us will do for us what we cannot do for ourselves, thus making us acceptable to God.

But who can fully pay for our sins? Who can live perfectly, without even one sin, to earn God’s favor for us? Who can make us acceptable to God? The biblical answer is unmistakably clear—only God himself! And that is precisely what he’s done. Though under no obligation whatsoever to do so, he has, in pure grace, out of the goodness of his heart, made sinners acceptable to himself.

How has God done such an unexpected, amazing thing as this? He’s done it in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son. And he has done it in such a way that his standard of justice and righteousness has not diminished at all. Christ, the eternal Son of God, came into this world and became a man, lived a life of sinless obedience to the Father, and died the death which sinners deserve to die, fully satisfying the demands of God’s law. In Christ Jesus, sinners are declared to be reconciled to God and accepted. “God hath made him [Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor 5:21). “God hath made us accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6).

Ultimately, “accepting” is God’s prerogative. Salvation is his act, of his own initiative. The situation of the sinner is hopeless. Salvation comes through the gracious intervention of God who steps in and has mercy upon sinners in their hopeless condition. “Salvation is of the LORD” (Jonah 2:9). Salvation is not so much the sinner accepting God, as it is God accepting the sinner, who, in desperation, turns from sin clinging to Christ. This is the gospel message which exalts God and rightly positions him on the throne! At no time has salvation ever been turned over to men to save themselves when they will! In grace, the emphasis is not on the recipient, but on the Giver!

Is this the gospel of your salvation? Are you still thinking in terms of what you have done for God, or are you depending entirely on what Christ has done for you, that you might be made acceptable to God?

I can almost hear someone saying, “But how about my decision? Didn’t I have to do something? Didn’t I at least have to decide for Jesus?” I will let Mr. Spurgeon give an answer from his autobiography:

When I was coming to Christ, I thought I was doing it all myself, and though I sought the Lord earnestly, I had no idea the Lord was seeking me. I do not think the young convert is at first aware of this. I can recall the very day and hour when first I received those truths in my own soul—when they were, as John Bunyan says, “burnt into my heart as with a hot iron”; and I can recollect how I felt that I had grown on a sudden from a babe into a man—that I had made progress in scriptural knowledge, through having found, once for all, the clue to the truth of God.

One week-night, when I was sitting in the house of God, I was not thinking much about the preacher’s sermon, for I did not believe it. The thought struck me, “How did you come to be a Christian?” I sought the Lord. “But how did you come to seek the Lord?” The truth flashed across my mind in a moment—I would not have sought him unless there had been some previous influence in my mind to cause me to seek him. “I prayed,” thought I, but then I asked myself, “How came I to pray?” I was induced to pray by reading the Scriptures. “How came I to read the Scriptures?” What led me to do so? Then, in a moment, I saw that God was behind it all, and that he was the Author of my faith, and so the whole doctrine of grace opened up to me, and from that doctrine, I have not departed to this day, and I desire to make this my constant confession—I ascribe my change wholly to God.

Yes, in conversion we do desire Christ, and we do make a choice; but even all that is his work of grace in us—“For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil 2:13). God doesn’t save a man against his will; he first makes him willing—“Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power” (Psalm 110:3). Such willingness is not natural to man. It comes only by God’s grace, and that, as the apostle Paul testified, is “when it pleases God” (Gal 1:15-16). When some of the Gentiles believed as a result of the preaching of Paul and Barnabas, it was because they had been “ordained to eternal life” (Acts 13:48). And when Lydia responded to Paul’s message, it was because unknown to her the Lord came and opened her heart (Acts 16:14). Those who truly come to Christ in saving faith are “drawn” to him effectually through God’s gracious workings in them (John 6:44,65).

Most of us have seen the famous painting that depicts Jesus standing outside of a door, gently knocking to gain admission. It is supposed to represent access to the sinner’s heart and deliberately has no knob on the outside. The message is that Jesus is powerless to do anything except to knock and hope that the sinner will let him in. Such a picture is a gross distortion of biblical truth. It is based on Revelation 3:20—a passage that is not dealing with an evangelical call to the unconverted, but with the warnings and exhortations of Christ to a wayward church.

True, the passage does say that it is not Jesus himself who opens the door, but rather those who “hear” his voice. But who is it that “hears” his voice? Is it not “sheep”? (see John 10:27). It is not an appeal to unregenerate sinners to “give their hearts to Jesus,” but a rebuke to an assembly whose worldly interests had all but destroyed their former intimate fellowship with Christ (Jon Zens).

Man in his natural state is opposed to God and his truth, unless and until God changes his sinful heart—“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). “A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven” (John 3:27). “Men love darkness rather than light” (John 3:19).

John 1:12 is often quoted as if a man’s eternal salvation hinged upon his reception of Christ: “To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” But even here in this famous text John strips men of all boasting rights whatsoever when he declares that the reason any man receives Christ is because of the enabling grace of God in *the new birth*—“which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (v 13).

If we love God, it is only because he previously loved us. “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). If we have chosen God, it is only because he previously chose us. “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you” (John 15:16). Has this humbling truth ever gripped your soul? Do you see that you are an unworthy sinner whose only way of acceptance with God is that you be found in Christ—“accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6). Has God accepted you?

Come to Christ today as an empty-handed beggar, humbly casting yourself upon his mercy, marveling in his infinite love. He saves only needy sinners. Accept him the way a drowning man accepts a life preserver, the way a beggar accepts alms, the way a prisoner accepts freedom! Receive him as a sick man would welcome the physician!

Too many people today are trusting in their “decision for Jesus.” But it cannot save. Remember Judas made his “decision for Jesus” too. Christ’s blood and righteousness alone is our only hope before God. Are your eyes spiritually focused upon him, and him alone? He’s “a just God and a Saviour,” who says, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth” (Isaiah 45:21-22). “The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Trust him today! ■

—Adapted from the writings of Daniel Chamberlin