

Covenant Love

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Preacher: Stefan Zurcher

[0:00] A welcome to all of you who are visiting us today at Grace Fellowship Church. And we have a special welcome to Stefan and Stephanie Zerkner and their two girls, Hannah and Louise.

This is the kind of missions we want to be involved in. We sent out one and we got four back. That's multiplication. And that means the next time we see them at that rate, there will be 16 of them.

A fourfold increase. And we're thankful for the work of God going on in Payerne, Switzerland. And our brother is going to give a brief report on that and then bring the word of God to us.

A lesson from God's word here. We welcome the high school class with us. Stefan, come and report and teach us. When we will come back in a few years, God willing, you will see if your pastor is a true prophet or not.

Numbers will show. We very much looked forward to coming back and seeing you all. When I say we, I speak, of course, for Stephanie and myself.

[1:16] I'm not sure if she's in now. She might be with the girls in the nursery for the moment. And we look forward to that because we are very much attached to you all and have great memories of our, Stephanie's time here in the church.

And also when we came here to be married, actually. And yeah, it's always really a great joy and an encouragement to visit with you. And to have fellowship and to see the church that so faithfully has supported us in Switzerland for many years.

And I would first like to thank you for your support in prayer and also your financial support over many years. And your ongoing support for Olivier, who now has moved to France, to Alsace, where he continues his ministry.

And I would like to give you the greetings from the church in Payern, who had also the joy of having Pastor John and Joes over last November when we had a farewell and installation service in our church.

So that was a great blessing to us to have them with us. I hope my Swiss accent, which still is there despite all the teaching I received with Stephanie, I hope my accent will not be too disturbing for you and I hope you can follow my explanations, the news I will give of the church and afterwards also the teaching from God's word.

[2:44] So to some news of the church in Payern, I referred already a little bit to this transition, Olivier moving to France and taking on a new ministry there.

And myself being called as the pastor in the church in Payern. And I was still working as a physician part-time the first three months of the year.

But now since the beginning of April, I have been engaged full-time by the church. And that is a true relief also to be able to concentrate on the work for the church.

And I think we can really be thankful so far, in particular for the unity of the church in all this time of transition, because a change like that is a vulnerable time for the church.

And we have really seen a church that is united in the decisions that have been taken. And I think we owe this to a great extent to Olivier's wisdom in preparing the church.

[3:49] He has prepared the church over several years to this change. It was not just a decision that came suddenly and the church was confronted with him leaving, but he has really prepared the church.

And the church was united in all these decisions. And I think that helps a lot to go through it and to go through it also full of confidence in the Lord.

So I'm thankful for that. And thankful also if you can continue to pray for us, since it still is a big change and a vulnerable time for the whole church.

So continue to pray that we would really be united in this somehow new era of our local church. And I'm personally thankful if you can pray for me as I take on this new responsibility, because I have a lot to learn in how to lead the church and how to take care of it.

Maybe I gained some theory ahead of time, but in practice there is so much to learn. So I'm thankful also for your prayer in that.

[5:02] For some other news of the church, to give you a little idea on what is going on in our church, just a great blessing that we have seen over the last three and a half years is 16 births that took place in the church.

So we have 16 really small children. We have some older children also. So that's a huge blessing. And at the same time, it's a subject of prayer, because we need God's wisdom in raising these children and in teaching them.

So pray for all these children. And we are also encouraged to see some fruit to our evangelistic activities.

You might remember maybe that we have two main activities of outreach. One is that we serve a soup once a week on Tuesday at lunchtime in the town of Payern.

And the second activity is that we open our facilities in the center of Payern on Saturday mornings to offer a coffee.

[6:12] And over the last few years, it has given a lot of contacts like this. And there's several people who come and stay with us for these occasions and with whom we were able to build a true relationship and get to know them.

And I think there is a confidence that has grown. And what is very encouraging, I think, is mainly two people that got into contact with us, with the church, through these activities and who started attending the church.

One is a man in his 70s. I do not exactly know where he stands. It's possible that he mainly first came for social reasons because he enjoyed the contact and thought that there were some nice people at church.

I hope at least that we are nice people. But I have the impression that he is willing to listen to what is taught when we offer the soup. We always have a moment where we read a passage in Scripture, we explain it.

And he listens and seems to agree with what is taught. And that's really encouraging. So pray for him that he would really come to a saving knowledge of Christ. And another person is an old lady.

[7:24] She is in her 90s, but still very active. And she is living on her own and independent. And she too started coming to church, to Sunday services sometimes.

So with her too, I have the impression that there is some true interest. I do not know exactly how much she really understood for the moment, but it's an encouragement to see these people join us in our church activities.

And there is a bunch of other people that are really regularly there and with whom we have good contacts. And we just hope that they would also hear the gospel clearly taught and that they would understand it and come to faith.

So please pray for these activities still. And maybe one more pray request that is a little bit linked to these new people coming to church.

It is a great joy on the one hand. It is also a challenge, actually, because it's not the only new people who come. There are others that have joined us. And whenever there is new people coming, they come with their background, with their own ideas, maybe we have a tendency to like our familiar comfort in church.

[8:43] We have been used to be a small group for a long time. And so we know each other very well. It's really a family that we have at church. And when new people come, they can disturb a little bit this family piece, I would say.

And that's why I say it is a challenge to really receive these people with patience and grace and love and being ready to be disturbed in our comfort and rejoice, actually, in seeing new people being added to the church.

So I think that's a real need that we have as a church to have a right attitude in receiving these new people and not just being concerned about our own comfort.

It's my own tendency, and I think it's a tendency of the church. And that's why I think it's an important prayer subject. So I will stop it here for the news.

There would be a lot more to say. We have maybe there's an Ascension Day conference that we have with the other Reformed Baptist churches. There is a summer camp that is organized again this year.

[9:58] You can pray for all these activities, too, of course. But if you have any specific questions, you can still come to Stephanie or to myself afterwards, and we can talk about it.

But I would like to go on with a Bible lesson. And for this, you can open your Bible in 2 Samuel 9. 2 Samuel 9. And while you open your Bible, I would just like you to know that I owe a lot of what I will develop to one commentary in particular, which was written by Dale Ralph Davis.

Maybe some of you know this author. He has written several commentaries, mostly on historical Old Testament books. And I think they're really good reads.

Even just for a devotional reading, he has a very simple style, always a very good redemptive perspective. He always manages to link these texts to the gospel.

[11:03] And it's really very well applied also to the reader, to us today. So I can really warmly recommend these commentaries by Dale Ralph Davis.

I'm going to read then 2 Samuel 9. David asked, Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?

Now there was a servant of Saul's household named Zeba. They called him to appear before David, and the king said to him, Are you Zeba? Your servant, he replied.

The king asked, Is there no one still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show God's kindness? Zeba answered the king, There is still a son of Jonathan.

He is crippled in both feet. Where is he? The king asked. Zeba answered, He is at the house of Machir, son of Amiel in Lodebar.

[12:17] So King David had him brought from Lodebar from the house of Machir, son of Amiel. When Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor.

David said, Mephibosheth, Your servant, he replied. 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's soul, and you will always eat at my table. Mephibosheth bowed down and said, What is your servant that you should notice, a dead dog like me?

Then the king summoned Zeba, 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. And Mephibosheth, grandson of your master, will always eat at my table. Now Zeba had 15 sons and 20 servants. Then Zeba said to the king, Your servant will do whatever my lord the king commands his servant to do.

[13:37] So Mephibosheth ate at David's table like one of the king's sons. Mephibosheth had a young son named Micah, I'm not sure how to pronounce it, and all the members of Zeba's household were servants of Mephibosheth.

And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem because he always ate at the king's table, and he was crippled in both feet. Maybe you wonder what we can learn from this chapter, because at first glance there hardly seems to be any theology in it.

At least that was my thought when I started working on it for a Bible study that we had a few weeks ago. But the more I worked on this text, the more I was amazed to see the precious teaching that it contains for us today.

But before asking you some questions and develop the text, I would like to give you some background information, because I'm conscious that we are jumping here in the middle of history, and you do not necessarily have all the context in mind.

So when we arrive at this point in the books of Samuel, David finds himself at rest for the first time in many years.

[15:01] There have been years probably of persecution by Saul, where he was always fearing for his life, hiding in caves and living in precarious conditions.

And when he finally became king, things were not quite settled yet. He first was only king over the southern part of the kingdom, when he stayed in Hebron for seven years.

And it's only after that he became king of the whole kingdom, the northern part too, and that he conquered Jerusalem and made it the capital of the kingdom.

But even then, things were not quite settled yet, because Israel was still menaced. Is menaced English?

Yeah? By all the surrounding countries, they were enemies that were always threatening Israel. And it took several more years to defeat all these enemies, so that Israel would really be finally at peace, and that Israel could rest.

[16 : 10] And King David here, for the first time in many years, finds himself at rest. Chapter 8 is an important chapter that shows how God granted David victory over all these enemies.

And in chapter 7 already, we find for the first time this mention of David, David being at rest.

Chapter 7 and 8 are probably not in chronological order. So when you read in chapter 7, verse 1, it says, After the king was settled in his palace, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him.

Chapter 8 afterwards shows how God gave him rest from all these enemies, how God gave him the victory over all these enemies. So there could hardly be a better time to relax, and just to enjoy this newly established comfort, and the state of peace that he had never had for so many years.

But David does not simply relax. And that's what we see in this chapter 9. He, instead of putting up his feet on a chair and leaning back, he launches an inquiry, and looks for any survivor of the house of Saul, when he says, Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?

And the first question I would like to ask you is, why would David still bother with the family of his fiercest enemy?

[17 : 49] Well, now that he's established like that, why would he still bother with the family of his former enemy, Saul, who now is dead? Do you see any indications in the text that show us what the reason behind this is?

What is this? Yeah? For the sake of his friend Jonathan. Yeah, the text says that I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake, and what you mention is that Jonathan was his friend, and you might remember that there was a true friendship between these two men.

But does the friendship explain it all? Because if I have a good friend, that that friend dies, why would I go and take care of his family or of his household once he dies?

Is it just the friendship that motivates David, or is there maybe more? There is more. Actually, this chapter teaches us a lot about covenants, covenants.

Because the real reason why David would look for a descendant of Saul, someone of Saul's family, of Jonathan's family, the real reason is that there is a covenant.

[19 : 20] Now, maybe you wonder how I can make that statement, how I can speak of a covenant, because the text does not speak directly of a covenant.

So let's just look at two elements that help us understand why this is about a covenant. And for this, we first have to go back to 1 Samuel 20, verse 14.

1 Samuel 20, and verse 14.

And this is Jonathan speaking. He sees, Jonathan was believed that David was really the new anointed king, that he would come to power.

And seeing this coming, he asks David to show kindness to him. So we read in verse 14, But show me unfailing kindness, like that of the Lord as long as I live, so that I may not be killed.

[20 : 28] And do not ever cut off your kindness from my family. Not even when the Lord has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth. That's what we have now.

All his enemies have been cut off. From the face of the earth. So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, May the Lord call David's enemies to account.

And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself. So you see, this text really shows us that David was linked to Jonathan by a covenant.

And this covenant was probably reiterated or repeated in chapter 23, verse 18.

That was the last time the two friends would see each other. And we read there that the two of them made a covenant before the Lord. And David went home.

[21 : 29] And David remained at Horesh. So we have two texts there in 1 Samuel that speak of a covenant between David and Jonathan.

But there is a second thing in our text that points us to the true reason of David's seeking of a descendant of Saul.

The true reason that is a covenant. And it's actually the Hebrew word that is translated in our Bibles by showing kindness. The Hebrew word for showing kindness is *chesed*.

And Hebrew scholars, I'm not one of them. I do not even understand or read Hebrew. But Hebrew scholars say that this is a very difficult word to translate because it has such a richness of meaning. And if you look at various translations of the Bible, you can find translations like loving kindness, mercy, steadfast love, and sometimes loyalty also.

[22 : 35] But what helps us maybe even more to understand the meaning of this word *chesed* is to realize that in the Old Testament, it's almost exclusively used in the context of the special love of God for his chosen people.

So it's a word for love or kindness, loyalty, that is specifically used in the context of a covenant. So you see that we have two reasons why we can make this conclusion that this chapter, the reason for David to seek a descendant of Saul's or Jonathan's family, the reason is a covenant.

Chesed describes really an unconditional, faithful, exclusive love, a devoted love that is based on a promise and a solemn engagement.

So if you look just at all this so far, do you see what we can learn from this text already?

Do you see any even application for us when we look at the fact that a covenant made way back in the past is directing David's actions in the present?

[23 : 59] What does that tell us about the covenant? Any ideas? Yes.

Something we see always with David in 1 Samuel and also the beginning of 2 Samuel, he had a consciousness of the presence of God and he had a true fear of God.

So when he would make a promise, he would make a promise before God. So it tells us something about the binding nature of a covenant. Even though many years have passed and even though the conditions would not at all push David to come back to an old covenant, he cannot simply forget it because a covenant is binding.

There is a binding obligation in a covenant. And so David knew something about this binding nature of a covenant and of the urgency to fulfill a promise.

And that's why he does not simply lean back and relax, but why he goes and looks for a descendant of Saul. And how much that teaches us today about the importance to be faithful to the promises we make.

[25 : 25] And there is an obvious application to marriage, of course, which is maybe the most solemn and clear covenant that we have today before God.

And Dale Ralph Davis shows that very well, I think. He quotes a movie scene to illustrate how this applies to marriage. It's a scene where a woman asks her lover if he would not want to marry her. And he answers, do you really think that a piece of paper, that I will love you more because of a piece of paper? Now, this answer, the answer of this man, I think really shows and represents all the misconception about love and marriage that we see in our surrounding culture.

And Davis says, a marriage covenant never claims to regulate love's intensity. That's what this man meant when he said, do you really think I will love you more because of a piece of paper?

And he says, a marriage covenant never claims love's intensity, but only its security. And that's what we see here with David, with his covenant towards Jonathan.

[26 : 50] The circumstances would not at all push him to express love. He could simply relax, but he has made a covenant promise, and it is binding.

So there's security in the promise that he has made. Covenant love is faithful even when we do not feel like it.

David might not have felt like it, but he knew something about this binding nature of a covenant, and that's why he is faithful to it and seeks to fulfill his promise.

Now, let's go a little further and look at what follows. First, Zeba, servant of the house of Saul, is brought to David, and he informs David of the existence of Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan.

And what do we know about this son of Jonathan, Mephibosheth? What do you see in the text? What do we know about him? He is crippled or lame, depending on the translation.

[27 : 56] What else? He is? In Lodibbar. What does that mean? Lodibbar.

Yeah, the place he is living. He is living with someone, actually. At the end of our text, we see also that he has a young son in verse 12.

And when we go back to chapter 4, 2 Samuel chapter 4, we learn a little more about the tragic circumstances that led to his being lame.

2 Samuel chapter 4, verse 4, where it says that Jonathan's son, son of Saul, had a son who was lame in both feet.

He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jazeera. It was the news about their death, actually. His nurse picked him up and fled, but as she hurried to leave, he fell and became crippled.

[29 : 00] His name was Mephibosheth. And I think that Mephibosheth probably has lived a hidden life from that day on.

From the day on, that David became the king. And at least, David apparently knew nothing about his survival, which is highly improbable or unusual when we consider that he was his best friend's son.

He didn't know anything about his survival. And do you have any idea why he would have hidden, actually? Yeah?

Jim? In those days, a new king took over, the old king's family was wiped out.

Exactly. That was the common practice. There was probably nothing worse that you could inherit than being part of the wrong family. And he was part of the wrong family, of the former regime, of the former king who was David's fiercest enemy.

[30 : 16] So he had to fear for his life when David became king. Davis has a poignant way of pointing this out when he says, Mephibosheth was maybe lame in his legs but not in his head.

He understood this very well. And that's why he would hide. So he was lame, he was crippled, he was helpless, and he was part of the wrong family.

There was quite some reason to fear the new king. And when we try to understand why he would deserve David's kindness, we do not find any reason.

There was nothing that qualified Mephibosheth to benefit from David's kindness. We see also that he really feared David the moment he appears before him because he bows down.

And I think it was not just an expression of his honoring the king. There was fear in it because the first thing David says to him is, Don't be afraid. But when he appears before the king, he does not receive what he expected.

[31 : 30] but he is received with grace. And David pours out on him rich blessings. And why would this be so?

It's because of Chesed, the covenant love that David had promised to Jonathan and to Jonathan's family. So let's look at these blessings shortly.

And let's look at how Mephibosheth's condition changes. That's mostly in verse 7 where we find three things that, where we find three blessings I think.

The first one is protection. Do not fear. Don't be afraid. I will surely show you kindness for your father Jonathan's sake.

He was helpless and the moment he appears before David he finds himself protected by the new king. The second blessing we see in verse 7 is provision.

[32 : 35] So there is protection. There is provision. Verse 7 still where he says so I'll just have to take the text again sorry. I will restore to you all the lands that belonged to your grandfather Saul and you will always eat at my table.

And when we go on we see how David gives the instructions to Ziba Saul's former servant to be an administrator of Mephibosheth's lands and wealth and to take care of the provision for Mephibosheth.

so he probably lived a hidden life in someone else's house. He was without means and he finds himself cared for by the king.

And the third thing we see is a whole new and glorious position. There is protection, there is provision, and there is a new glorious position.

That's in verses 7, 10, 11, 13. Four times we find the same formulation, you will eat at the king's table or at my table. And in one verse in verse 11 he even says, like one of the king's sons.

[33 : 58] He had been living a life of fear, he was hiding from the king, and he finds himself sitting at the king's table. What a change of fate this is.

What a change of this helpless man's condition. Now, when we try to apply this teaching to us, we would completely miss the point if we just take David as an example to follow in covenant

faithfulness.

Because this text ultimately points us to the covenant love of God. And maybe you have seen this detail in verse 3 when David repeats his question when he looks for some descendant of Saul. He says that I might show the kindness of God. David always saw himself as a servant of God towards the people that God had given him.

And I think that's why God also calls him a man after his own heart. God's covenant love.

[35:09] So David reflect God's covenant love. And there's a second element that shows us I think that this is about God's covenant love.

When we try to think whom can we really identify with in this text? Do we just identify with David and try to follow his example? Or is it not rather Mephibosheth?

Do we not resemble Mephibosheth first of all? I have to go a little fast without asking you the questions but I want to finish this point.

When we look at the New Testament how the New Testament describes our basic condition compared to Mephibosheth's. What do we see? Ephesians chapter 2 says that because of our transgressions and sins we were actually we were by nature children of God children of wrath we were dead because of our transgressions and sins.

Is this not to the same degree a state of helplessness as Mephibosheth's as we have just seen it? Romans chapter 5 says refers to the same reality of being part of the wrong family when Paul says when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his son.

[36:41] Mephibosheth was part of the enemy's family and so are we. so we too are part of the wrong family we too are helpless we see it in Romans chapter 5 too when we were still powerless or without strength Christ died for the ungodly.

And I mentioned this before Ephesians even goes as far as to say that we were dead in our transgressions and sins. You see the parallel of condition Mephibosheth's condition and ours yet he finds himself suddenly protected and provided for by the king and placed at his table like one of the king's sons and the same is true for us because king David was by the type of the king to come Jesus Christ the one who would rule with perfect righteousness and who would love his people with a perfect covenant love and so for us who are part of God's new covenant in Christ we too find ourselves protected by the king what then shall we say to these things if God is for us who can be against us we are protected by the king who shall bring a charge against

God's elect who is he who condemns who shall separate us from the love of Christ Romans 8 we too are provided for by the king therefore do not worry saying what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear for all after all these things the Gentiles seek for your heavenly father knows that you need all these things Matthew chapter 6 and we too are established in a new and glorious position at the king's table but as many as received him to them he gave the right to become children of God Mephibosheth was received like one of the king's sons and so are we like the king's sons at his table with a free access to his throne of grace and again if you ask why why such a change of condition for us who were part of the wrong family that of you and me and who were helpless and entirely dependent it cannot give but the same answer again it is because of chesed covenant love the covenant love of

God which is faithful unconditional timeless it's because of the covenant that God made through Jesus Christ and that he sealed with his blood so it is the understanding of covenant of God's covenant love that urged David to fulfill his promise and pour out his rich blessings on Mephibosheth and it is God's covenant love that assures us of God's faithfulness and of all the richness of his blessings in Christ time is gone I will just close by prayer Lord and heavenly father we thank you for this chapter that teaches us so much about your covenant love love that you have proven towards us and that you and that

Christ has died for us while we were still sinners and we have seen Mephibosheth's reaction when he says but why would you show such a kindness to a dead dog like me and how not cry out with the same words why would you have loved us in such a way Lord we cannot but recognize and bow before you and proclaim that it is because of your willful decision to love it is because you have taken this solemn engagement to love us unconditionally with a timeless faithful love that can be changed by nothing Lord we praise you for your covenant love towards your people and we pray that you help us to understand it more and more and to dwell in your love fully assured of your faithfulness and grace we pray in Jesus name amen