

Have you ever been a recipient of an unexpected gift that came at just the right time when needed? There were times as a pastor that I would receive a notification that the church had been named as a beneficiary of someone's estate. One such time I had no idea who the person was and there was no one in the church that knew the name or even a family by that name. It was a mystery to us, and I even called the attorney to make sure he had the right church as there is another church with the same name in another part of the state. I was assured we were the right church, and we graciously received the unexpected gift. Such unexpected gifts can be life changing for the people of God.

In our scripture this morning we have the story of Mephibosheth who receives a huge life changing gift from King David. But there is much more to this story than just a gift of land and sitting at the King's table. We must go back to the beginning of Mephibosheth's life. He was the son of Jonathan and grandson of King Saul. When the Philistines killed Jonathan and his brothers, King Saul was badly wounded and to save face, he fell on his own sword and died. Word came to those in Saul's household that they were out to kill all of Saul's family. Mephibosheth was 5 years old at the time, so his nurse hastily grabbed him up and ran off with him, dropping him in the process and he became lame in both legs. His nurse took him to a desert town named Lo Debar to hide him. He grew up in the shame of being crippled in a town where outcasts were welcome. The name Mephibosheth means dispeller of shame, or as I like to say - he is a shame buster.

Now David had become King over Judah, the Southern Kingdom, after King Saul died and after a long war between Judah and Israel David became King over both the Southern and Northern Kingdoms of Israel. As King David went to take over the fortified city of Jerusalem, the Jebusites who lived there taunted him saying "You will not get in here, even the blind and the lame can ward you off." This made David very angry, and even his soul hated anyone who was blind or lame. In fact, he would not allow them in his presence and most certainly not in his house. He went so far in his shameful behavior that he ordered his men to kill anyone who was blind or lame. The question must be asked, why was he so angry and afraid of the blind or lame ones? After all he had stood up to Goliath and killed the giant with a stone. What was it about the Jebusites taunting him that brought out his anger? Do you suppose that David's pride was injured? After all, he was King, and he was coming to set up his capital that became known as the city of David. Proverbs 11:2 says, "When pride comes, then comes shame; But with the humble is wisdom." David's pride became sinful as he orders the killing of the blind and lame.

In our scripture reading David asks, "Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" This is in reference to the covenant relationship that David had with Jonathan. Covenant responsibility required that David show kindness or loyalty to Jonathan's remaining family members. If you remember back to June, Pastor Keith had a message on David and Jonathan's covenant relationship. He used the Hebrew word *hesed* to describe covenant love that shows mercy, loving-kindness and loyalty for covenant people. So now David is in a quandary when he tells Ziba, the servant in Saul's household to bring Mephibosheth to him. Will his sense of covenant responsibility override his decree to kill the blind and lame?

David's motive for finding any remaining family members seems to be covenant responsibility, but when Mephibosheth is brought into David's presence Mephibosheth doesn't react like it is covenant love that brought him there. In fact, Mephibosheth bowed down and said, "What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?" The normal tradition of that day was whoever was next in line in the family would become king. But if there was a new line of kings, like David was, then he was to kill off any remaining family members who would be a threat to his kingship. So, I can imagine that Mephibosheth was scared to death to come before King David. He had two reasons to be worried about losing his life. First, he was the rightful heir of King Saul so the throne could have legally been his but because Jonathan had transferred his rights to the throne to David in their covenant, the kingship went to David. Secondly David had decreed that anyone who was lame or blind would be killed. So of course, Mephibosheth referred to himself as a dead dog.

What a surprise Mephibosheth must have had when David says, "I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table." This was no small thing, this was huge! This was a complete turn around for David in allowing a lame man to eat at the king's table. The keeping of covenant responsibility dispelled the shame of David's pride associated with the blind and lame. And for Mephibosheth he went from facing certain death to be treated like royalty. His shame of being lame in both feet was broken off him. He truly lived up to his name of being a shame buster. The covenant relationship changes everything even today.

This story of David and Mephibosheth is a picture of the covenant relationship we have with God through Jesus Christ. Jesus took our sins and our shame with him to the cross and became sin, receiving the judgement of God for our sins. When we accept Jesus as our savior, he saves us from our own sinful and shameful behaviors.

Maybe you, like David, struggle with being too prideful. Maybe you have some other sin that comes to your mind right now. It is time to let go of that sin and let Jesus' nail scarred hands hold it for you. Spend a moment of silence giving the sins to Jesus that come to your mind right now.

Lord, you have received the sins of your people, and we ask now for your forgiveness to be spread abroad in our hearts. Allow your mercy and grace to dispel any shame we may experience. Lord, we accept Jesus as our savior and enter a covenant relationship with God our father whose *hesed*, his loving-kindness dispels and destroys our shame. We are brought into the family of God where we can now share in the riches of Christ Jesus and eat at his table. Amen.