

Next week we're going to start a short series in **Haggai**. In it we'll see that God's people are called to build God's house; that God promises that a time when a new temple will have more glory than the first temple; and, that he will bless them for their obedience.

Today, we're thinking about this character Mephibosheth and the **unlikely** events that happened to him. Maybe it's a story you've not heard before, or it was a long time ago and you'd forgotten it. It's not a story that I've heard many sermons on but it's a great story. I'm kind of assuming that all of us have had the experience of something unlikely happening to us. Now, I've got a theory, for those of us who have children, for every child you have, the likelihood of something unlikely happening to you increases by at least tenfold for each child. Alasdair in Tesco, Inverness – "Mother, mother, bring me the axe!" Radiographer.

Well, today we're going to encounter an unlikely and beautiful truth, from a biblical character named Mephibosheth, whose story starts for us in 2 Samuel chapter 4, verse 4. If you have your Bibles, turn there. Follow along in your talk notes, or on your YouVersion Live event – any way you like. We're going to be in **2 Samuel chapter 4**, verse 4.

The Bible says, "*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.*"

Let's pause for just a second. It's very important to understand the power of this story, that we get the context of these characters who are in it. So, we're going to go back here, and we're going to take a look at this.

At that time Saul was the King of Israel and he had a son, Jonathan and he had a son Mephibosheth. David – as in David and Goliath - is going to succeed Saul as king, even although that should really have been Jonathan's place, and then Mephibosheth after him.

Imagine, five years old ... You're just simply out, playing in the courtyard, having a fun day, doing whatever royal kids do, just hanging out, having a good time. The palace doors bust open! Suddenly it's pandemonium. People are screaming and shouting. All you know is, you're like, "What's going on?" And they say that your dad and your granddad have been killed in a battle. That's a bad start to a day for a five-year-old kid – for anybody, much less five years old.

But it gets worse. They're all in a panic because, you see, David was on his way to the palace to assume power. Now, that would have been a problem in this monarchy, because any time, in a monarchy, that family lines change, what happens to the old family? They become eradicated. They kill them off. Why? Because you do not want a potential heir to the throne to be alive. So, everybody's freaking out in the palace, thinking they're going to get killed, including Mephibosheth. Why? Because his dad had been killed, and his grandfather, which would have put him next in line. Therefore, he would have been first in line for the chop.

But, David and Jonathan, also, were really good friends. Therefore, it's almost as if David could have been, like, this hero to Mephibosheth. In modern-day times, he may have even had a poster on his wall of him. And David, because of his relationship with Jonathan, he could have even been, like, a family friend to Mephibosheth. I mean, he was almost like an honorary uncle.

So, Mephibosheth is thinking, *My dad is dead, killed in battle. My grandfather's dead. And now, David ... Well, it's going to be okay, because David's coming.* And they're saying, "No, he wants to kill you." "What do you mean? I don't understand!" It's a lot for a kid to try to take in – for anybody! And all of a sudden, they're in this panic, right?

Well, in the panic, the nurse picks him up and begins to run, as they continue in verse 4, and she drops him, and he breaks both legs, and becomes crippled. Five years old ... They pick him back up. They don't have time to set a splint. They don't have time to do anything. They just run with him, out to a place called Lo-debar, which we'll talk about in a little bit. He's five years old and his whole world has been flipped on its head.

Have you ever had a Mephibosheth moment in your life, where you're sitting there, and everything's just fine – you're hanging out in the palace; everything's good – and then, all of a sudden your world is upside down? I know some of you here today know what that's like - a doctor gives you a report that you did not expect. One day you felt healthy; the next day, you feel like everything has been turned on end. Maybe it's that someone who you thought you could trust violated that trust. Maybe it was a relationship that you thought would go the distance, but it's crumbled down around you. Maybe something has happened to someone you love and it's just put your whole world upside down. And in that moment, you begin to understand where Mephibosheth is.

And for him, years go by, and nothing happens. He doesn't get healed. He doesn't get helped. He's just broken. That's the story of Mephibosheth ...

But one day, the Bible says, in **2 Samuel chapter 9**, verse 1 – *David asked, "Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?"*

Now, based on what we know about the killing off of a monarchy, that's an odd question. It's kind of interesting. Unless you understand context ...

You see, as we talked about, Jonathan and David were actually very, very good friends. At one point in Scripture, what had happened was, David had been anointed by an Old Testament prophet named Samuel. Jonathan was aware of this. The anointing was that David would be the king of Israel. Jonathan believed it. Therefore, he talked to David and said, "Listen, when you become king, would you show kindness to me and my family?" Because remember, it wouldn't be a good thing for Jonathan if the royal line changed. He said, "Would you show

kindness to me and my family?” And David says, “As surely as the Lord lives, I will show kindness to you and to your family.”

Now, he had made this promise, this covenant, with Jonathan, that he would do this. And the Bible records, in 2 Samuel 9, that one day – I don’t know why. Perhaps it’s the same time of year where David had lost Jonathan. Maybe it’s that they were out doing something that he and Jonathan used to love to do together. And for whatever reason, it brings to mind, for David, this promise, this covenant, his love for his dear friend, whom he has lost. And he asks the question.

When the servant Ziba is asked he knows that Mephibosheth is still alive but what he says is **interesting** (Verse 3) – *there is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in both feet*. In other words, he is of no value. In that society he is simply a burden.

Now, in our point today, in our culture, we understand this to be absolutely absurd, and quite ridiculous. Because we know that any physical limitation placed upon you has no bearing on God’s ability to work through you. And in fact, many times, He works through you in a greater way, and in a greater sense. So, we understand it to be absurd. But in the context of this story, it’s important to note how quickly Ziba just brushes him aside. He’s like, “Yeah, but, you know ... There is one, but you don’t want him.”

This is not the response that David gives, though. He says, “Well, where is he? Bring him here.” It turned out he was still in Lo-debar.

Lo-debar was a place that meant “a place of no bread.” It can also mean ‘no pasture’ or ‘no word’. It’s considered an arid, dry – a desolate place, a place way out in the middle of nowhere. You would almost say that Mephibosheth had been placed in the Witness Protection Program. Because they thought David wanted to kill him, they took him out to this place, this distant place, a place of no bread.

In fact, in 1 Chronicles chapter 8, it’s important to note that in the genealogy of King Saul, Mephibosheth was not even actually his name. His given name was Meribaal, which meant “an opponent of Baal.” Baal was an Old Testament false god. So, it’s as if his father, Jonathan, named his son Meribaal, saying, “You are of royal lineage. You are an opponent of false gods. You are stately, and you are royal, and you are my son, Meribaal.” But his name got changed to Mephibosheth, which means “son of shame,” or “shameful thing.”

So, could you imagine: five years old, you lose your father, your grandfather. Your legs become broken. Those whom you thought you could trust, you can’t. You are taken away from a palace, and left out in some place called Lo-debar, and your name is changed from “an opponent of Baal,” and “Meribaal,” to “Mephibosheth, you son of shame.”

So, Mephibosheth has lived many, many years out in Lo-debar. We do not know how many years; the Bible's not very clear on this. We do know that he's grown, at this point. He's not a little kid anymore, and he's grown, and he's out there. And Ziba comes to the door and knocks, and he says David wants to see him.

This is not a good day for Mephibosheth! It's like the incarnation of all the fear, and the worry, and the terror that had haunted him for years is coming to his door. Because he had to have grown up hating David! Because, *It's David's fault that I am out here in this desolate place. It's David's fault that I'm a fugitive. It's David's fault that my legs got broke. It's David. And now he wants me dead. I knew it's been coming! They've been telling me it's been coming, for years. And now the time is here.* Surely he must have felt something like that.

But this is where the story takes an unlikely turn. 2 Samuel 9:7 *“Don't be afraid ... I intend to show kindness to you because of my promise to your father, Jonathan. I will give you all [of] the property that once belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will eat here with me at the king's table!”*

8 Mephibosheth bowed respectfully and exclaimed, “Who is your servant, that you should show such kindness to a dead dog like me?”

What a terrible thing to say about yourself: “I'm a dead dog.” But then, we almost see why, right here in the next verse. It says all these years of hiding had made Mephibosheth think of **himself as worthless**.

Have you ever found yourself at a place where you kind of felt like you'd become worthless, or maybe you weren't worthy of something? Or maybe you felt inadequate for the task that's been put before you?

You see, for Mephibosheth, in this moment, as he's receiving this blessing from King David, everything that he had believed, everything that he had known, everything that he had internalized about David, had been wrong! He had to be confused, trying to figure out what is going on. He had to be bowing, waiting, knowing – coming to the palace, just waiting on the sword to come across his neck! But it didn't happen. Everything that he had thought, everything that he thought was about to happen, everything that he knew David stood for, everything that he knew David wanted to do to him, was wrong.

And in the same way, many of us find ourselves pushing ourselves, spiritually, out to a place like Lo-debar – a desolate place, spiritually, where we begin to believe and internalize these things that we think about ourselves and God. We think, *Oh, He's angry at me because, well, I haven't been doing what I know I probably should be doing for Him. Or, You know what? He's angry at me, and I know He's upset, and He's just waiting to get me. He's just waiting, and I know that something's coming.* Or maybe it's that you've carried guilt, for years, for

something that wasn't even your fault. But for some reason, you carry this guilt, and you think God is upset or angry in some way. Or maybe you've come to believe that you're a failure.

And what I'm here to tell you is that that's just wrong. You see, in the same way that David had an unlikely and a different outcome for Mephibosheth, God's desire for you is to bless you, and to bring you a hope and a future – to make you whole and give you new life. It's a twist in the story, all of a sudden, for Mephibosheth, and it's possible for you and me.

David restores land to Mephibosheth – not just a room or two but all the land that had belonged to his grandfather Saul. He also gave him servants to care for him and make sure he was provided for.

And then, I love this – in verse 11 “*So Mephibosheth ate at David's table like one of the king's own sons.*” How about that? What an amazing story of restoration, and David bringing him to a place of honor, and power. I love that kind of story. I don't know if you've ever watched programmes like DIY SOS where they take a family that is struggling and living in poor conditions and they do a make over on the house. People give up their time and money to help people they don't even know – and there are always tears at the end. Why are these stories popular?

Because these types of stories, this story of Mephibosheth, and this little boy who had had this terrible beginning, yet ends up with this beautiful ending – that type of a story is etched on the very DNA of our souls, because you've got to understand that we are Mephibosheth. You see, the story of Mephibosheth is a true story from the Old Testament that, also, is an allegory of what Christ has done for you, and for me.

We are all Mephibosheth!

Well, first, we are fallen and broken. Oh, perhaps you are not fallen and broken physically, but every single one of us are fallen and broken spiritually. You see, in **Romans chapter 3**, verse 23, the Bible says that we have all sinned and fallen short of God's standard. In the same way that Mephibosheth had fallen, and was broken, we, too, are fallen and broken.

Second: the great thing about this story is, Mephibosheth wasn't just left there. We, we are pursued by the King. Just as Mephibosheth was pursued by King David, we're pursued by the King – not a king that's here on earth that can grant us land, or some kind of wealth, or material possession. We are pursued by the King of kings, and the Lord of lords. We're pursued by Jesus Christ.

In John chapter 3, verse 17, the Bible says, *For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.* – an unlikely twist to the story. And the same truth is true for us, that, you know, as Mephibosheth was pursued by King David, we have been pursued by the King of kings.

So, we were fallen and are broken, but we were pursued by the King. Lastly, when he was eating at the king's table his infirmity didn't matter. When people looked on at Mephibosheth, they didn't see a broken young man. They saw someone who was of power, who was of position, who had been granted access by the king, and they saw someone who sat there "like one of the king's own sons." When believers go to God he doesn't see the sin – he sees Christ in us. He doesn't see the spiritual infirmity, he sees Christ in us, because through faith we are his sons and daughters.

We were fallen and broken but the King decided to do the unlikely and, through the sacrifice of his own Son, offers us forgiveness and restoration, so that, through faith in Christ, we may eat regularly at his table.

Spiritually we need to do that as often as we can through prayer, bible study and meeting together; physically we have another opportunity to do that today.

I'm going to show you a sentence and would you quietly put your name in the space and think 1. Is it true? 2. How does it feel?

So, _____ who was broken, eats regularly at the table of the King.

I asked you to think how it felt to put your own name in there because I think it probably took Mephibosheth some time to trust David and that in the early days he would have been waiting to see if it wasn't some elaborate joke at his expense before he was finally executed. I wonder if you still felt, "it can't be true for me".

It is true – John 3:16 says, *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* It doesn't say those who are already good, those who are rich, those who have their lives sorted or anything like that – it says 'whoever believes' WILL receive eternal life.

If you have never asked for forgiveness and asked Jesus into your life then spiritually you are Mephibosheth in Lo-Debar – a wilderness place where nothing can satisfy your spiritual hunger. The fact that you're here today shows that you are being pursued by the King who invites you to his table.

If you are a believer already the King says come to my table, to the place reserved for my children and be restored.