

2 Samuel 8-9

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[0 : 00] So, 2 Samuel 8 and 9. Chapter 9, I've only picked it up in my brilliant Hebrew pronunciation.! You learn about David's kindness to Jonathan's sons.

! And Jonathan, you remember, was a really close friend of David. The story of their friendship, if you remember, is narrated in 1 Samuel. But even in 2 Samuel, we're told again and again how close they were.

And you might recall that when David heard about Jonathan's death, this is what he said, chapter 1 verse 26, he says this, I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan. Very pleasant have you been to me.

Your love to me was extraordinary, surpassing the love of me. And again, as I read into the background to this chapter, I want to address with you again this question, that over the last couple of decades, a growing number of people suggest that Jonathan and David were gay.

You kind of find it in lots of places as you study these passages. That commentators over the last 20 years say, I've looked at this close relationship between two men, and they say, well, they must have been in love together, they must have been bad fellas, rather than just be friends.

[1 : 24] And I find the gay reading of David and Jonathan pretty offensive. And for two reasons, I want to say. Number one, I find it offensive because it suggests that two men can't enjoy this kind of deep, close intimate friendship.

Without it being confused as something sexual. As if there's no other kind of intimacy between two men, other than sexual intimacy. I've got friends with men, some of them are here, that are warm and intimate.

Our friendships, that in a very real sense, and a different sense, are better than the love of a woman. And that's no disrespect to my wife. And I really resent what's said about David and Jonathan, because it demeans and it marginalises friendships between men.

And I want this church to be a church where there is deep friendship between the men. But the other reason why I'm offended by the gay reading of David and Jonathan is because I'm a Christian, and as a Christian, I love the Bible like you do.

And I believe that God exercises his authority through his word. And so when people interpret the Bible like this, even though there does seem to be a scrap of evidence of the sport theory, it bothers me, it should bother you.

[2 : 54] And it bothers me because they're reading it against the grain. What they're doing is they're reading something into the Bible, rather than looking at what's actually there. they're reading in their own preferences and their own beliefs, and they're trying to make the Bible fit those beliefs and justify those preferences.

And as a result, they challenge the authority of God. And of course, I feel the same way about a whole load of other different approaches to the Bible as well.

The sort of approaches that have been encouraged by recent literary theory. And so let me give you a little detour, alright? I hope young people, this might help you.

It might not. And so you will come across, they probably don't call it, but you might come across something more postmodern literary theory. If you don't know those words, don't worry about it, I'll explain it. Basically what it means is that meaning is created by the readers more than the text. Do you understand that? So all readers, you and I, we've got our biases and we've got our personalities and our worldviews. And so when we read, we can't have to but read the text in the light of who we are.

[4 : 13] And postmodern literary theory says that this is something to be celebrated rather than resisted. And so, if you look at it, this approach to the Bible has kind of spawned lots of different

approaches to the Bible.

So, you can have a post-colonial reading of the Bible. You can have a feminist reading of the Bible. You can have a gay reading of the Bible. An environmentalist reading of the Bible.

And the idea here is this, you come to the Bible and you read it from your perspective and then you say, this is what I think it means from my perspective. Now, in one sense, postmodern literary theories is helpful.

It's true, isn't it, that when we come to the Bible, when you come to the Bible, you can't but read it who you are and what you believe and what you've experienced in the light of that.

It's one of the reasons why individuals respond in different ways to books, to films and songs because we're different. I think it's helpful to be aware of.

[5 : 22] It's good to be conscious when we read the Bible about our biases and our preferences. But the problem is, postmodern literary theories go way beyond that.

It's throwing the baby out with the bathwater. because it wants to say to you and I that there's meaning, there's the meaning you bring into it.

But we know, don't we, that there's meaning in text independent of the readers. And normally, authors intend something which they write.

So, when your mum or dad writes a post-it note to you reminding you of something, they are intending something, aren't they?

They're not thinking, well, you can just interpret this whenever you want. There's meaning by the author. And so it's not enough to look for ways in which this text or that text intersects or affirms how I already see the world.

[6 : 25] because if you do that, it will always involve reading text against the grain. It might be into a kind of violence to the text and it will undermine the authority of the author of the text.

And that's how many people read the Bible today. Now I know that's been a pretty long and laborious introduction. But I think it's really relevant when you come to these two chapters and we can't get away from that.

And I hope it'll become clear as we look at it. So what I'm going to do is to jump into the text. And so what we want to do is we've got to try and read with the grain to be careful not to read against it.

And what I think you've got is two chapters that's really simple. You've got two chapters. Number one about David's victory, chapter eight. Number two David's kindness. But actually what we find is when we study and read it properly we've seen God's victory and God's kindness.

And so chapter eight, God's victory, chapter nine, God's kindness. Let's start with chapter eight. So if you know 2 Samuel, you will know that he's established his throne, David has, in the first three chapters. He's resolved all the internal issues of the kingdom.

[7 : 39] the transition from Saul to David is now pretty much complete. And he's turning his attention in the first chapter, chapter eight, to his enemies.

And there were many powerful enemies. Nations around Israel, many borders to protect. So chapter eight catalogs what David did. So verse one, chapter eight, he defeated the Philistines and subdued them.

In verse two, he defeated and then he defeated the Moabites. Basically, he defeated Moab and he measured them with a line, making them lie down on the ground.

Two lines he measured to be put to death and one full line to be spared. And the Moabites became servants to David and World Tribute.

And I think if you've understood that verse, that is troubling to our ears. In reality, it's no more violent than verse one, but it's just a bit more explicit.

[8 : 46] And therefore, it's a bit more confronting, isn't it? And so I want to point out, in its original context, it would have been more likely to have been read being about David's mercy than about David's flexed muscles.

muscles. So I presume that if an enemy could be totally wiped out, then they would be. We are aware, aren't we, in time past, God himself commanded the total annihilation of his opponents. But you notice in verse 2, David didn't do that. Here he chooses the spare self. And he finds a completely objective way to spare self.

I've got no doubt that it was humiliating for the Moabites, and it was no doubt a terrifying experience, and we shouldn't downplay that. But I do think it's possible that you and I are meant to see in David's treatment of the Moabites a merciful king.

So similarly in verses 3 and 4 David also defeated Haladiza, the son of Ramon, king of Zonoba, as he went to restore his power at the ravine!

[9 : 59] And David was trapped from his 1,700 horsemen and 20,000 soldiers. He would hamstring all the chariot horses, but left enough for 100 chariots.

And once again, I want to say you didn't have to spare any horses. And the purpose of these battles was to kind of subjugate his enemies. enemies. And in this period, the way that you did that is you wanted to leave your enemies as weak as possible.

But here again you see David showing some mercy in allowing the people of Haladiza their horses to continue to use. David eliminated them as a military threat, but he continued to provide for them in their domestic life.

Now again, I'm not trying to ignore the real violence here. The harshness of these times. I realise these are innocent horses, and in lots of respect they've been rendered lame.

And that is good finding. It challenges our modern sensibilities. But I do want you to see how would it have been read in David's day, going with the grain.

[11 : 16] Verses 6 to 9, David subdues the Arameans. And then in verses 9 to 12, there's the king of Hamoth.

King Toy of Hamoth. He makes a treaty with David, he gives David gold and silver and bronze to enrich David's treasury. And then verse 11, there is also King David dedicated to the lords together with silver and gold that he dedicated from all the nations that he subdued.

And in verse 13 to 14, David subdues Edomites and at the end of the chapter 15 to 18 you've got a summary of David's entirety. So here we go, it's a transitional point in one cycle.

It shows David's blessing, David's power and its high point. It's not hard to see the original point of this chapter in its context.

David, King David, is progressively overcoming all his enemies. And he's overcoming them one by one. And it was never going to be bloodless. But we must never let the grim bloodiness of the chapter distract us.

[12 : 29] Because the Israelites in this time and for centuries after would not have read these verses and squirmed. I don't think that would have even occurred to them to ask questions the efforts of war at time.

They would have read chapter eight and they would have cheered. David is victorious. And that David's kingship of people were being protected. They were being kept safe, they were being prosperous.

This is the golden era of Israel's history. And the centricity and the aggressive putting down of their neighbours was how it started.

And so when they read this chapter, they wouldn't have just been cheering for David, they would have also been cheering for God. Because what the chapter makes abundantly clear is that the victories of David were ultimately God's victories.

So at the end of verse 6, can you see it? The Lord gave victory to David wherever he went. So repeat it again in verse 14, the Lord gave victory to David wherever he went.

[13 : 42] So David's victories were a gift from God. And they were the fulfilment of God's promise to his people. And they were a testimony to the power of God and the love of God, his chosen nation.

God's And so we need to make sure that we don't read this chapter against the grain. We must take care not just to see the violence, and I think not just to see David's power, we must also see the Lord's victory.

So in chapter 9, God's kindness. And this is where the history of Jonathan's friendship is so important, why I spoke about it at the start of the circle. And why that background is so important. So I'm trying to remember this one, David asks, doesn't he, is there anyone still left in the house of Saul, and I make sure he can't ask for Jonathan's sake. What would have been normal in David's day?

And what did Liz trust you when she appointed a new cabinet? Whose supporters did she get rid of? Do you remember? Rishi Sunak, she purged the cabinet of Rishi Sunak's supporters.

[14 : 53] And so, that's not a very helpful paradigm, but a king in those days, what would he do to his predecessor's family?

I think it would be normal in those days for a new king to eliminate all potential arrivals. And that would normally even hold families wiped out. And while many of Saul's family members have lost their lives over the last couple of years at this point, David has studiously avoided any hand in that. Remember that? He's been innocent of blood. And he's most definitely avoided wiping them all out. And this is in part because he made it clear, didn't he, out of his respect for the Lord's anointed. But it's also because of his love for his friend Jonathan. And in response to David's inquiry, verse 1, there's a man called Zeba who was found, who was a servant to Saul's family. And Zeba tells David Jonathan had a son, but he's a crippled son, Mephibosheth.

We hear about how he became disabled in chapter 4 and verse 4. And we hear that Mephibosheth is being looked after by a kind family in Lodai.

[16:09] David sends for him and when Mephibosheth arrives, Mephibosheth is obviously and clearly uncertain about why he's been son.

He's clearly nervous about what to expect. So verse 6 and verse 7 Mephibosheth son of Jonathan son of Saul came to David and he fell in space from his village.

And David said, Mephibosheth. And he answered him, Behold, I'm your servant. And David said to him, Do not fear. For I will show you kindness to the secret of father, and I will restore you all the land of your father, and you shall eat your kind of always.

So verse 1, David wondered, Who in Saul's family can I show kindness to? And here he tells Mephibosheth, this is the kind of kindness you could expect from.

Kindness is the key word in chapter 9. And no doubt Mephibosheth was immensely relieved. David. He'd never met David, he just knew that David was part of the family of Saul's enemy.

[17:31] In many ways, he would have known that he was no less of a threat to David than the enemies who did crush the chapter. Technically, in those days, Mephibosheth was David's enemy, but Mephibosheth had nothing to fear from David because David loved his father.

And David had made a promise to his father. And so back in 1 Samuel 20 and verse 14, let me read to you the parting conversation between David and Jonathan. Jonathan says, if I'm still alive, show me, here it is, the steadfast love, the kindness of the Lord, that I may not die.

And do not cut off your steadfast love, your kindness from my house for heaven. And David made Jonathan swear again by his love for him, for he loved him as he loved his own son. So, do you see the words coming out of faithfulness?

Steadfast love, kindness. Do you hear how David described kindness like that? Show me the kindness like that of the Lord.

Because the kindness that David shows to Mephibosheth is a God-like kindness. It is promise-keeping kindness.

[18:52] It is the word that's spoken in the past that produces fidelity in the present. It is the experience of grace from a king beyond what one deserves.

It is the sword of kindness that sees that a person who should be a humble servant instead sits at the king's table like his son.

And did you notice that in the second half of the chapter, and that is exactly what David did do for Mephibosheth, the phrase he sat at the table keeps coming up like the sun.

It's mentioned in verse 7, verse 10, verse 11, verse 13. And so for the rest of his days, Mephibosheth tasted David's kindness.

And as he did, he tasted the kindness of God. And on that point, as I've thought about it, there are parallels out there between Mephibosheth's experience of David's kindness, and David's own experience of God's kindness.

[20:05] And so I want to read you Psalm 23. It's written by David. But I want to read it to you as if it's written by Mephibosheth.

I want to read it to you as if it's written by Mephibosheth about David. David is my shepherd, I shall walk. David makes me lie down and be past it.

He leads me beside still waters. David prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies. He anoints my head with oil and my cup of float.

surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of David forever. And I'm not making those alterations to be irreverent.

David of course is no substitute for the one who's the perfect shepherd. said. But I want you to see how really clearly David's kindness is not of his own making.

[21 : 14] It is a kindness that he has learnt from God. And he'd learnt it from the one who had always been a shepherd. David's kindness was the kindness of God.

So as we stand back and we reflect on these two chapters, what do we see? What does it mean for us as we put these two chapters together? We read a chapter about the victory of David, which is really the victory of God. And we see the chapter about the kindness of David, which is really the kindness of God.

But that's all we can say. Now unless I'm really mistaken, I think it's also true when we come to a chapter like chapter 9, we're quick to affirm it, don't we?

We love the story of the first chapter. Kindness to the vulnerable, the outcast, the disabled. When we come to chapter 8, we're unkind.

And we're tempted to feel a little bit embarrassed about chapter 8. Am I right? And I think we've got a bit of a problem. I want to suggest to you, if we like chapter 9 and don't like chapter 8, if we're glad chapter 9 is in the Bible, but we wish chapter 8 was hidden, I think there's a bit of an issue, because both are placed there by God.

[22 : 32] And both tell us something about God, and perhaps, most tellingly, for hundreds of years after these chapters were written, the people of God would have loved these chapters equally. And they would have cheered when chapter 8 was read, and they would have cheered when chapter 9 was read.

And so if we react to these chapters differently, may I suggest to you, we are reading against the grain. Chapter 8 is precisely, and I do want to reflect as we finish tonight, on that, that when these two chapters are read, often the first thing that people like us notice is the violence, and it makes us feel uncomfortable.

And that's not surprising. Chapter 8 tells us of David's conduct. I don't know if you can condone David's conduct in that lecture. I can't say to you tonight, go and do likewise. Chapter 8 is precisely the kind of chapter that the opponents of Christianity, they pick out and they say, look at your God. How archaic the Bible is, how cruel the God is. And it makes us uncomfortable. But if the way we read chapter 8 focuses on the way that we can defend it against those charges, I think it's possible that we end up interacting with it in the light of our own preferences.

If all we do with chapter 8 is we try and explain bits of it away or hide bits of it, what makes us different from those of Orphan, Gabriel, Frederick, David and Jonathan?

[24 : 11] And so one of the key challenges for you and I is how do we submit our preferences to the authority of the author? How can we read the text with the grain?

How can we read it so that we end up appreciating chapter 8 exactly like the author intended us to? Even while we wrestle with our questions. Exactly what was it that made the readers of chapter 8 cheer?

And that of course I think has got a lot to do with how we think of justice to God. And so after we've asked ourselves the principle question, can we submit our preferences to God's authority?

We need to ask the more focused question, can we submit to God's perfect justice? Because that is what the first readers rejoice in. God fulfilling his promise to press back his enemies.

God bringing his judgment against those nations that rejected him and rejected them. And that is what the author intended you and I to be glad about as we read this chapter.

[25 : 23] The way that God was protected and the way that God was providing for his people as their enemies are finally overthrown. It was written in a very different time tonight.

What David did was not morally questionable then. But in our time, in our culture, David's actions, they do offend modern sensibilities.

We don't think chapter 8 is an ethical war making. But I wonder whether it's our serene, safe, stable life that enables us to have these modern sensibilities and to judge other types.

But nevertheless, embracing chapter 8 doesn't mean we say go and do likewise. This is not a model. But we should acknowledge, shouldn't we, that it wasn't problematic then in the same way. In fact, as I've hinted at tonight, what David did suggested that he was far more merciful than his contemporaries. And so being people who submit to God means being people who submit to God's word.

[26 : 49] All of us. We shouldn't pick the bits we like, the bits we'd rather rub out. We must be very careful not to read in our own modern preferences, lest we become like the Bible readers who offend us.

And so we must embrace chapter 8 like we embrace every other part of the Bible. And we must read with the grain. And that means embracing the justice of God about which this chapter speaks. And in the end there's very good reason to do that. In the end you do want a God who does what is right. And in the end you do want a God who pushes back all injustice, who triumphs over all of those who oppose it, and mock him and ignore him.

And I've said that we shouldn't pick and choose the bits we like, but when it comes down to it I don't think we want to either. The Bible doesn't give us a choice, but it shows that we need a God who is kind and victorious.

We need a God who is both tender and just. We need a God who is always compassionate, sometimes angry. And in part the Bible persuades us this by showing us our God in the person of Jesus Christ.

[28 : 11] Jesus who claims he remembers he's the Savior of the world but he's also the judge of the world. Jesus who showed untold tenderness with the Samaritan woman at a well who two chapters earlier made a whip and drove people from the temple with a zealous fury.

And Jesus shows you both the justice and the compassion of God. Just like David did. He shows us God's victory and this kindness.

I've never had a better moment so we wouldn't have been any other way. So as I finish, I want to finish on this note. Why do we submit to his kindness? That should be the easiest thing in the world for you to do.

To submit to the kindness of God. But because of the warpedness and perversity of the people and her, it doesn't always end that way. It's harder than it looks to submit to his kindness.

Because to do so requires gratitude of humility. It requires you and it to admit spiritually we are cripples. By nature, we are the king's enemies and yet we've been summoned to his court.

[29 : 34] God. And we would have every reason to come trembling before him and yet when we come to God, we find ourselves not only to be like Mephibosheth in our disability, but also like him in a surprising way that we've been caught up in the king's favour.

Chapter 9, it paints a picture which ought to be very, very familiar to us. because it's a picture of the victorious and kind Jesus who trudged the road to the cross to bleed for us.

So that we too tonight have found ourselves the recipients of astounding kindness. And so if you trust in the Lord Jesus Christ you are like me and Mephibosheth at the Lord's table.

And so we read Psalm 23 and we find ourselves in it because the one who now sits on David's throne is a shepherd to us.

In a way that David could never be to a purgish and we find ourselves in that Psalm because in submitting to his kindness that's where our souls are blessed.

[30 : 56] And something finished by reading that time and then we sang to the Lord is my shepherd I shall not want He makes me lie down in green baskets He leads me beside the waters He restores my soul He leads me in paths of righteousness for His needs to even though I walk to the valley the shadow of death I will feel no evil for you are with me your rod and your staff they cover me you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies you invite my head in oil my cup overflows Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life I shall dwell in the hearts of the Lord that's not the second something of of of