

Cowards, Cripples and Crooks (Summer Bible Exposition 7)

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[0 : 00] Well, let's pray. And we pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, friends, the books of 1 and 2 Samuel are just wonderful, great books. I've often thought they are of the stuff that would make great movies.

Some people have made attempts to do it. None very well, I think. They are full of all the things that make great movies. You know, kings and queens, adventurers, adulterers, there's sex, there's incest, there's intrigue, there's murder, there's mayhem.

Mayhem. They are the sorts of books that never let up in their excitement. They never let up in their analysis of human character. And the part of Samuel that we are going to look at tonight is one of the great sections of Samuel.

So you've got a great couple of books, and this is one of the great sections of the books of 1 and 2 Samuel. It is regarded as one of the grand pieces of narrative literature in the Bible.

[1 : 25] Well, students and scholars of the Bible place this section of the Bible from chapter 9 through to 20 alongside the story of Joseph at the end of the book of Genesis.

You see, with chapter 9 of 2 Samuel, we begin a story that is almost uninterrupted until the 1 Kings chapter 2. It is the story of David's court.

And it is filled with a palace and scandal and intrigue and bickering and the struggle to succeed David to the throne.

And because of the content and the style of this particular story, these chapters are amongst the most exciting and interesting chapters in the Old Testament. They are full of an unusual artistic quality, of striking narrative detail, of quite profound character development.

Characters are often portrayed in these chapters with quite raw and unusually detailed realism. And there is a shift in these chapters from the very public life of David into his private life.

[2 : 36] We are about to enter into the private life of a king. And these stories are full of ambiguity, the sort of ambiguity that can be found in the private lives of all people.

But these chapters increasingly move the focus on David the man, not just David the king. Along with this, these chapters are quite interesting because God is largely invisible.

He is less visible. His voice is rarely heard in these chapters. So they are intriguing chapters. So let's get started with them. And I want to remind you of where we are.

David, you remember, is now king over all of Israel. He has his capital city in Jerusalem. He has the Ark of the Covenant there in that city.

David has been given the great promise of God, of a dynasty, that God will bless. And chapter 8 takes us out of that and it focuses on David and his wars and his officials.

[3 : 38] But chapter 9 introduces us to the first of three snapshots that will occur at the beginning, the middle, and the end of this story of chapters 9 to 20.

These three snapshots we are going to look at tonight will be snapshots of three people relating to each other. They are three snapshots of three ordinary human beings engaged in relationship.

The first snapshot is the one we've just read, chapter 9. The second is in 2 Samuel 16 verses 1 to 4. And the third occurs in 2 Samuel 19 verses 25 to 31.

Now, before we get underway, let me just give you an overview of the story between chapter 9 and chapter 20 or thereabouts. In 2 Samuel chapter 9, David is a secure king.

In 2 Samuel chapter 11, you remember, and we're going to look at this on Wednesday night, he sees a beautiful woman bathing outside his palace. And he likes the look of her and he kills and murders her husband in order to get her for himself.

[4 : 48] And as a result, he loses the first of four sons who will be born until 1 Kings chapter 2. And loses the first son born to him and Bathsheba.

In chapter 13, David's firstborn son Amnon commits incest with his stepsister Tamar. And in the second half of chapter 13, we meet Absalom, the brother of Tamar who's just been raped and the second born son of David.

He murders Amnon in revenge for his sister's rape. And then in chapter 15, war erupts. In chapter 15, Absalom throws his father off the throne and wages war against David.

In chapter 18, David wins the war and his son Absalom is killed off by David's general. David then returns to Jerusalem in chapter 19.

That's an overview of these passages. Let's have a look at chapter 9 together. And as we do, I want to introduce you to the main players here, the major figures of our passages tonight. Each of these figures occurs in each of the passages.

[5 : 57] First, there is David. Then there is a man called Mephibosheth. Now, what is the striking characteristic of Mephibosheth? Do you remember it from the passage? He's a cripple.

He's lame. Okay. And finally, there's Ziba. You might remember him. He is the servant of Mephibosheth. He had been the servant of Saul. Now, turn to chapter 9 with me.

In it, we encounter a David we have not seen so far in the books of Samuel. All is well with David. I mean, you have not seen David with all well up until this point.

All is well in 2 Samuel 9. He is in a position of extraordinary strength. He has a throne, a capital city, the blessing of God. He can afford to be extremely generous.

And he is. He thinks back. He remembers in his history his grand friend, Jonathan, Saul's son. His best friend.

[6 : 54] A friend that he said in chapter 1 had been closer than a brother. A friend that 1 Samuel told us he had made a covenant with. And the words, I suspect, still echo through his brain on this day.

For David said this, or Jonathan said this to David. Listen to these words. They are the words of covenant. May the Lord be with you, David. If I survive, then make sure that you show me the kindness of the Lord so that I won't have to die.

And do not cut the kindness from my family either. When the Lord cuts off all your enemies from the face of the earth, do not let the name of Jonathan be cut off from the family of David.

That's the covenant these men made with each other. Jonathan, however, is no longer around. He is dead. The victim of the same battle his father died in.

And so David asks, Is there anyone left of Saul's family that I might show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?

[8 : 04] Now I want you to notice something about the word that he uses. That word kindness or steadfast love, as some versions have it. That word is the Hebrew word that is a Hebrew word that is very difficult to translate.

Our English versions use a multitude of different words to translate it or phrases. It's a word that is often used of God. It means God's spontaneous, generous, unobligated, outgoing love.

It is a word that is often used of God. David uses it three times in this chapter. He remembers the covenant made with Jonathan and he yearns to show God love to him.

Spontaneous, generous love to someone because of Jonathan. That is where Ziba comes in. Ziba is the servant of Saul. Let's see what kind of treatment the author gives him.

Have a look in your Bibles with me. Let's see how it's presented. To do this, please just follow the text with me. David comes and speaks a complete sentence to him, as it were. He says, are you Ziba?

[9 : 07] And the curt reply comes back to your servant. Now, I want you to notice something. This man is in the presence of a king. What do you do in the presence of a king? You bow, don't you?

Not Ziba. He does not bow. He does not engage in ceremony. And I want you to contrast this with his master, Mephibosheth. Mephibosheth is the remaining son of Jonathan.

He is not summoned by courtiers, but by the king himself. And the scene is immensely powerful. I mean, imagine it. I can, in my imagination, think of what might happen.

Here is this man, Mephibosheth, probably carted in by servants. Unable to walk. Put down before the king. And David doesn't even give him a full sentence that Ziba received.

He simply says, Mephibosheth. And the courteous reply comes back, your servant. Behold your servant. And David promises to him kindness to Mephibosheth for the sake of Jonathan.

[10 : 07] And his kindness is going to express itself concretely. By the way, did you notice that he bows? Anyway, although Saul's possessions had probably reverted to the crown.

Remember what might have happened in the ancient world. When one king conquered another, what did he do? Took all his property. Probably slaughtered his kids. So what's happening here is immensely kind.

Immensely benevolent. This cripple cannot look after this land by himself. He'll need help. And so Ziba will assist. And Mephibosheth will be given a place of honor in the court.

David's warmth. David's care just ooze from this chapter. Mephibosheth is grateful. He again bows, perhaps with great difficulty. He's amazed at the king's generosity.

What is your servant that you should look upon such a dead dog as I? And then we return to Ziba. And we again find him mouthing multiple references to serving and being a servant.

[11 : 06] And we find ourselves asking this. And I think the writer wants us to ask. Does, is it matched by action? Is this Ziba just saying it?

Is he really going to be a good servant or not? Well, the next two stories are going to answer our questions. Let's now turn, if you can, in your Bibles to Samuel chapter 16.

Now, let me tell you, a long time has passed. Times have changed. David is no longer secure as he was in chapter 9. No, he is in full flight.

His son has made a bid for the throne. Absalom has taken the place of his father, the king. He has caused him to flee from his capital city, Jerusalem.

And so we find David. He's climbing up the Mount of Olives. He's down. He's depressed. His chief advisor has defected from him.

[12 : 02] His son, his firstborn son, has betrayed him. Or the firstborn son that's currently alive. And who should turn up? But Ziba.

And Ziba's not alone. He is bearing gifts. Can you see it there in verses 1 to 4? A man who comes, he is a man who comes with donkeys, bearing a heavy load. And, you know, David asks, what is this?

And the answer is well structured. There are three well-ordered sentences. Each names a part of the load and then names who it's intended for. Well, there are asses or donkeys for the king's court, bread and summer fruit, well, for the soldiers, wine for the fatigued men in the desert.

Now, imagine David at this moment. He is very, very down. He is weary, depressed, desperate for someone who will give him some sort of encouragement. And here this man turns up with this wealth of support.

It would have encouraged him no end. But he has some questions in his mind. He asks, and where is Mephibosheth? In other words, he's saying, you know, what is his position in all of this?

[13 : 07] Is he behind this or not? And Ziba replies, well, he's back in Jerusalem. And then he explains so David understands. He makes sure David understands what he's saying.

He aims to recover the throne that was Saul's and that you took away. Now, what do you reckon David's going to do at this point? He's grateful for food and support.

He's swayed by it. And what does he do? He believes it. And so he rewards the man. All the land of Mephibosheth is now to go to the servant Ziba.

It will be his reward. And do you notice something? Just have a look at the text. What does Ziba do now that he hadn't done before? He bows.

And he bows for a very good reason. You see, he has just become a big, wealthy landowner. He has done very well for a donkey laden.

[14 : 07] He has done very well indeed. All for the price of a donkey or two laden with food. He's done very well. Now, again, some time passes. And the tide of the battle turns.

And Absalom, this king's son, is defeated. And he's killed. And we come across Ziba again in chapter 19. Turn with me to chapter 19. Now, I'll just point out some things to you.

He is surrounded by a large number of Benjaminites. There, the tribe that Saul came from. Led by a man named Shimee. Now, if you've read the story, you might know a bit about Shimee. Shimee had insulted David.

Remember, David was fleeing up the Mount of Olives. And this man came walking alongside on a little ridge beside him, pelting him with rocks. His name was Shimee. And he said, God will get you, you man of blood.

That's the man who is here. Shimee is now trying his hardest to save his neck because David has been victorious. And Ziba is with these Benjaminites.

[15 : 08] It's not exactly very good company to be in, let me tell you. And then Mephibosheth appears. And he too pleads before the king. His claim? Innocence.

He has remained loyal. Ziba has lied about him. And then we come to David. Ziba has lied about him. A man faced with a very difficult decision. You see, what he's got in front of him, here is a king.

And he has in front of him two men. With two contradictory stories. Who do you believe? Who do you believe? If you were in David's shoes, what would you do at this point?

What would you do? Before you make a decision, let's see if we can find any more information to help us. And we can. Look at verse 24. You see, what the storyteller does is let us behind the scenes.

And he tells us what it was that the cripple did while David was in exile. He mourned. He went around barefooted. It's something you could actually see him doing.

[16:16] He went around barefooted. And he didn't trim his beard. So you could see his beard's been full and not trimmed. And he didn't wash his clothes so you could see that he was unwashed. And he responded to David's kindness rightly.

And he did that until David returned to Jerusalem. And then he didn't even wait until David actually arrived. He took the trouble. This cripple took the trouble to travel down to the Jordan.

He gives David an early welcome. And what the narrator is doing is he's telling us, you can have confidence in this cripple. He wants us to know what the cripple says is true.

You can see it by his feet, by his beard, by his appearance. He wants us to know that what the cripple says is the truth. And he wants us to know that David is faced with a very tricky situation.

Will he be able to convince David of his loyalty? And will David believe him? Why, says David.

[17:16] Why didn't you come with me, Mephibosheth? You know, why didn't you return the kindness I offered to you back there in chapter 9? David is not pleased at this point. He's uptight. And the cripple gives a long reply.

A well-worked-out speech. And his accusation is, Zeba has been deceitful. And he uses a play on words. It's a marvellous little play on words, which English can't pick up very well.

But what he does is he says, Zeba tripped up a lame man. You see the play on words? It's impossible to do. But he tripped up this lame man.

And he slandered his master. And then Mephibosheth effectively throws himself on David's mercy. And throws himself on the kindness of this king. And he dares to put himself completely in the hands of his ruler.

It's a very tight spot to be in for this cripple. You see, he cannot prove his innocence. All he can do is turn to the highest authority in the land for help.

[18:17] And so we have it. But there are the three snapshots of three men. Now, I want you to think on this story. I mean, I want you to evaluate each of these men. I've given you some clues as we've gone.

But join me in the evaluation. Zeba, David, Mephibosheth. Let's have a look at Zeba first. I mean, I think he's the easiest one to have a look at. He is a clever man if I ever saw one.

I mean, he is very cunning, isn't he? A man of foresight. A man of cunning. A shrewd man from start to finish. He's a man willing to take a risk. You see, and more than that, who was he?

He was the servant of Saul. In other words, he had seen David in action before. He expects David to be the ultimate winner. At least if he was a betting man, that's what he'd do.

A man who is so confident that I think he lays a bet on it. An astute man. He may not have predicted that he would get all of Mephibosheth's property. But he knew that he would not go unrewarded for his kindness to David in bringing that stuff at his lowest ebb.

[19:26] But the important thing to note is his motive. What was the motive of Zeba? It was not loyalty. It was not kindness.

It was not steadfast love. It cannot be. For his actions are at his master's expense. His motive is entirely self-interested.

He responds to David in a material way. Here are some donkeys and some food and some wine and so on. And in return, he hopes that he'll get some material benefit back. And what about David? Let's think about David for a moment.

Let's imagine ourselves in David's shoes. Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin. David had taken his place as king.

Bitterness ran very high between those two tribes. Particularly from Benjamin toward David. Mephibosheth was the grandson of Saul.

[20 : 23] Mephibosheth had a son. We know that from the text of Samuel. The son was not a cripple. The son was straight of body and limb. What might be going on in David's mind, do you think?

Perhaps the tribe of Benjamin's behind this. Perhaps Zeba is actually right. Perhaps they're just waiting to get their own back. And to place one of Saul's children on the throne again.

And when David is climbing up the Mount of Olives. When he's feeling down. When he's depressed. And when he's told that Mephibosheth has pretensions for putting a descendant of Saul. Back on the throne. It might just look possible.

Mightn't it? It might look plausible. However. It is not. Probable. And David should have known it.

After all. A cripple could never be a serious pretender for the throne. And rebellion had not come from Benjamin. It had come from David's own family. From Absalom. His son.

[21 : 22] And if anyone should have known Absalom. It was David. And there is no way that Absalom. The proud. Arrogant Absalom. Was going to place a Benjaminite pretender.

On the cripple. On the throne. Was there. But David's depressed. He's threatened from all sides. He's in a hurry. And the material aid looks good. So he believes Zeba. And he makes a legal decision.

And by the way. What should you do when you judge someone in the Old Testament? When someone accuses them of wrong. What should you do? You should have. Two or three. Witnesses.

There are no witnesses. And David makes an executive decision. He does not listen to the other side. He does not call witnesses. He forgets what he knows of Mephibosheth.

And he makes a rash decision. And in chapter 19. It all catches up with him. And it looks him straight in the eye. And he can see Mephibosheth. And he knows he's been mourning. And he looks it in the eye.

[22 : 20] And he's annoyed. And he's curt to Mephibosheth. And he shows no elegance. No courtesy. No rewarding the cripple's devotion. And in effect. I think he says something like this. Look I've had enough. I believe it. I've decided what to do.

It's a very painful scene. Chapter 19. And what does he do? He divides the property 50-50. Between these two men. Now let me just make a little aside here.

Let me tell you how I read the story. On the one hand. Zeba has been revealed as a slanderer. But on the other hand. His third was a real help.

Understandably. David wanted to reward this servant. But friends. Splitting the land 50-50. Is no way to do it.

What that is doing. Is it means going back on your previous decision. It means admitting that you really effectively. No longer believe Zeba. But you do believe Mephibosheth. And it means deep down.

- [23 : 17] You know the cripple is innocent. So David is torn in two. And you can see it in his reply. In verse 29 in chapter 19. He wants to reward Zeba. But he knows Mephibosheth. Is the one who's been wronged.
- By both Zeba and himself. And so David translates. His divided feelings. Into a divided decision. The two men. Must share the property.
- But you know. I think he makes this. This is a ghastly. Terrible mistake. You see. What David does. Is he's setting up some scales. And on the one side.
- He puts the immaterial loyalty. Of Mephibosheth. On the other. He puts the material support. Of Zeba. And in doing.
- And he counts them as being. Of the same weight. And in doing so. What he has really done. Is put deception. On the same level. As loyalty. He refuses to answer.
- [24 : 14] Loyalty with loyalty. Kindness with godly love. And he refuses. To confess his previous mistake. And his words show it. He is fearful. Of admitting his mistakes. Fearful of showing his failings.
- He is fearful. Of being honest. And he is fearful. Of losing face. And his decision. Is not that of a brave man. It is a cowardly decision. And everyone is looking on.
- And David feels ill at ease with it. But I want you to look lastly. At Mephibosheth. The last word you see is his. Look at it in verse 30. Of chapter 19.
- I'll let him take it all. Since my lord the king. Has come home safely. In the tension of the past few weeks. These are probably the most intimate.
- And devoted words. David has had uttered to him. By anyone. Mephibosheth. Mephibosheth is still loyal. He is like Jonathan his dad.
- [25 : 12] He still loves his king. The safe return of the king. Is everything for this man. The property is nothing. Because this king is everything.
- Zeba can keep it. Because the king has come home. So we see it don't we. You see the one who's physically lame. Is the one who's morally. And spiritually sound.
- What a contrast. To the corruption of Zeba. And what a contrast. To David's crippled judgment. Zeba here he is. Attached to material gain.
- David bound by frustration. And fear. And Mephibosheth the cripple. Who has risen above these things. Mephibosheth a man of principle. A man of devotion.
- A man of God. So I want to sum all this up. By travelling back in time. I want you to imagine it's a dark day. It's at night. There is a child.
- [26 : 12] A child of five asleep. A healthy child. An heir to the throne. But a child under threat. His father has just been killed.
- His grandfather has just suicided. He is the heir apparent. His nurse fears for his life. She takes this five year old.
- She holds him. And together they run. Running to save this child's life. He falls. And he lies in a crumpled heap.
- Broken. A cripple. Lame for the rest of his life. And his name? Mephibosheth. The story I told you is in Samuel.
- Sentenced for misery for life. Sentenced to pain. Sentenced to loss of movement. And loss of freedom. And yet despite it all. Mephibosheth enters the fight of life.
- [27 : 11] And he becomes a true man. For his suffering purifies him. His suffering brings about him. That quality of life. That quality of character.

That is used to describe the character of God. That word kindness. Is the word used in Exodus to describe God. The Lord. The Lord. The gracious and compassionate God. Abounding in steadfast love.

Slash kindness. Suffering. Produces loyalty. Kindness. Faithfulness. Loving kindness. Steadfast love. And while Zeba.

The healthy man. Is corrupt. And while the healthy David. Is weak-kneed. The cripple Mephibosheth. Is like God. A real man.

A person like God. I want to close this talk. I want to close this talk. By getting you to open your Bibles. In the New Testament. Could you turn with me to Romans chapter 5.

[28 : 08] And put your finger in Romans 5. So turn to Romans 5. And then I want you to find 2 Corinthians chapter 4 and 5.

And you can put your other finger there. Okay. So Romans 5 and then 2 Corinthians 4 and 5. And I'm going to read from. And I want you to read with me. Romans 5 verses 3 to 5.

With this image. This story. These encounters in our minds. Romans 5. 3 to 5. And not only this.

But we also boast in our sufferings. Knowing that suffering produces endurance. Endurance produces character. And character produces hope.

And hope does not disappoint us. Because God's love has been poured into our hearts. Through the Holy Spirit. That has been given to us. And friends. If you turn now to the 2 Corinthians passage.

[29 : 09] And I'm going to start at verse 7. And read to verse. Well I'll keep reading. And I'll tell you where I'm going as we go. So 2 Corinthians chapter 4.

Verse 7. But we have this treasure in clay jars. So that it may be made clear. That this extraordinary power belongs to God.

And does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way. But not crushed. Perplexed. But not driven to despair. Persecuted. But not forsaken. Struck down. But not destroyed.

Always carrying in our body. The death of Jesus. So that the life of Jesus. May also be visible in our bodies. For while we live. We are always being given up to death. For Jesus sake.

So that the life of Jesus. May be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us. But life in you. And then verse 13. But just as we have.

[30 : 05] Just as we have the same spirit of faith. That is in accordance with scripture. I believed. And so I spoke. We also believe. And so we speak. Because we know.

Because we know. That the one who raised the Lord Jesus. Will raise us also with Jesus. And bring us with you. Into his presence. Yes. Everything is for your sake. So that grace.

As it extends to more and more people. May increase thanksgiving. To the glory of God. And now I wonder if you just. Move. To. Oh no. We'll keep going. In verse 16.

So we do not lose heart. Even though. Our outer nature. Is wasting away. Our inner nature. Is being renewed. Day by day.

For this. Slight. Momentary affliction. Is preparing us for. An eternal weight of glory. Beyond all measure. Because we look. Not at what can be seen.

[30 : 59] But at what cannot be seen. For what can be seen. Is temporary. But what cannot be seen. Is eternal. Now if you move to. Chapter 5. And look at verse 16.

From now on then. We regard no one. From a human point of view. Even though we once knew Christ. From a human way. From a human point of view. We know him no longer. In that way. So if anyone is in Christ.

He is a new creation. Everything has passed away. See. Everything has become new. Friends. We are afflicted with the world. Aren't we? We look at status.

We look at attractiveness. We look at outward show. Our media parades. Beautiful people before us. We look at success.

We look at ability. And we measure. We look at people. But not God. But not God.

[32 : 04] God looks inside. To the things that last. And on the last day friends. The prizes go to people. Who are like his son on the inside.

The prizes friends. Do not go. To Nobel Prize winners. They do not go to Olympic gold medalists. Nor to the victors from the AFL.

Or the World Cup. Or the latest test. Or the Tour de France. Nor do they go to the models on the front cover of Vogue. No.

The medals go friends. To the poor. The lame. The crippled. The slow. The dependent. The ones who have learnt to call out to God for help.

The ones who have learnt to call out to God for help. The ones who are like God. Friends. In the language of Corinthians. God has chosen those who are poor.

[33 : 05] And low in the eyes of the world. To be rich in faith. Friends. Please hear me. Don't aspire to be winners in the world's eyes.

Aspire to be winners in God's eyes. Aspire to be like his son. Dependent. Obedient. Being willing to suffer death.

Even death on a cross as it were. Who loved God. So much that he followed him wherever God led. Friends. These are the people that are friends of God.

And that's why Jesus took a little child and said it among his disciples. And he said. When they asked who will be great in the kingdom. And he said. Ones like that. It is not innocent.

But those who have got nowhere else to go but to God. They are the ones who will be great in the kingdom of heaven. Let's pray. Friends.

[34 : 08] Father we thank you for this story. We ask that you forgive us. For we are so afflicted by the world that we live in.

We have our eyes trained to look at the wrong things. That we measure ourselves and we gauge others. With very worldly eyes.

Father we already know from your word. We have heard it about David. That you look to the inside. And we have seen it here in Mephibosheth as well. Father please may we be people.

Who learn. To humbly depend upon you. To call out to you for help. To train our character. To be like the character of your son. Father help us not to aspire to be winners in the world's eyes.

But to be winners in your eyes. To be children. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.