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## August 21st: 2 Samuel 9 & Philippians 2:12-30

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### Alastair Roberts

Lovingkindness to Mephibosheth. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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## Transcript

2 Samuel chapter 9 And David said, Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake? Now there was a servant of the house of Saul whose name was Zeba, and they called him to David. And the king said to him, Are you Zeba? And he said, I am your servant. And the king said, Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God to him? Zeba said to the king, There is still a son of Jonathan.

He is crippled in his feet. The king said to him, Where is he? And Zeba said to the king, He is in the house of Macchae the son of Amiel at Lodabar. Then king David sent and brought him from the house of Macchae the son of Amiel at Lodabar.

And Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, son of Saul, came to David and fell on his face and paid homage. And David said, Mephibosheth. And he answered, Behold, I am your servant.

And David said to him, Do not fear, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan, and I will restore to you all the land of Saul your father, and you shall eat at my table always. And he paid homage and said, What is your servant that you should show regard for a dead dog such as I? Then the king called Zeba Saul's servant and said to him, All that belong to Saul and to all his house I have given to your master's grandson. And you and your sons and your servants shall till the land for him and shall bring in the produce that your master's grandson may have bread to eat.

But Mephibosheth your master's grandson shall always eat at my table. Now Zeba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. Then Zeba said to the king, According to all that my lord the king commands his servant, so will your servant do.

So Mephibosheth ate at David's table like one of the king's sons. And Mephibosheth had a young son whose name was Micah. And all who lived in Zeba's house became Mephibosheth's servants.

So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, for he ate always at the king's table. Now he was lame in both his feet. Back in 1 Samuel chapter 20 verses 13 to 17, Jonathan had made a covenant with David, in which David had sworn to continue to show faithfulness to Jonathan's house after he ascended to power.

There Jonathan said to David, May the Lord be with you as he has been with my father. If I am still alive, show me the steadfast love of the Lord that I may not die. And do not cut off your steadfast love from my house forever, when the Lord cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth.

And Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, May the Lord take vengeance on David's enemies. And Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him, for he loved him as he loved his own soul. In 2 Samuel chapter 9, David is fulfilling this promise by taking regard for Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan.

In these chapters, we have been seeing David's establishment of his kingdom by defeating his enemies, capturing his capital, securing his kingdom, forming a well-ordered household, establishing the worship of the Lord, and preparing the material for the building of the temple. At the end of chapter 8, there was a list of David's chief officials and a description of his court. The chapters that preceded this were more thematic and covered material from the entirety of David's reign.

We read of the birth of Solomon and of military victories that have yet to occur in the chronological progression of the text. There is further dischronologised material appended to the narrative at the end of the book, but in this section we seem to be returning to something that is ordered more chronologically and less thematically. The story of Saul dominated 1 Samuel until his death and the death of Jonathan at the end of the book.

The shadow of Saul continued to rest over the early years of David's reign. In chapter 1, David mourned for Saul and Jonathan and killed the Amalekite who claimed to have killed Saul. In chapter 2, war broke out between Israel under Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, who was appointed king of Israel, and David as the king of Judah.

In chapter 3, we read of the defection of Abner, the former commander of Saul, his murder at the hands of Joab, and David's mourning over him. We also read of the return of Michael, the daughter of Saul, to David as his wife. In chapter 4, Ish-bosheth was assassinated and David killed his murderers.

In chapter 5, David was officially appointed a successor to Saul by Israel. In chapter 6, Michael was rendered baron. In chapter 7, the Lord promised to David that he would not remove his favour from David as he had from Saul.

So the relationship between David's kingdom and Saul's, the legitimacy of David's succession from Saul, the relative fates of the houses of David and Saul, and David's fulfillment of his faithfulness to Jonathan are prominent and important themes in 2 Samuel. We were introduced to the character of Mephibosheth back in chapter 4 verse 4. Jonathan, the son of Saul, had a son who was crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel, and his nurse took him up and fled, and as she fled in her haste he fell and became lame, and his name was Mephibosheth.

Now his thread in the narrative is taken up again. In 1 Chronicles chapter 8 verse 32 and 9 verse 40, Mephibosheth's name is given as Meribael. It was likely changed in the text, much as his uncle's name was changed from Eshbael to Ishbosheth.

In both cases it was probably changed to avoid using the name Baal as part of an Israelite name. Although it wouldn't have been used with an idolatrous sense, the idolatrous connotations seem to have loomed much larger in later history. However, it should also be noted that both Ishbosheth and Mephibosheth include shame as part of the meaning of their names.

Ishbosheth means man of shame, and Mephibosheth, as Peter Lighthouse remarks, means one who scatters shame or from the mouth of shame. Both men are associated with the aftermath of the fall of Saul and his sons at the battle of Gilboa. Ishbosheth is Saul's remaining son, doomed to failure, and Mephibosheth is a young man stunted by a fall on the day of the news of his father and grandfather's. Later in chapter 21 we read of other sons of Saul, who were presumably sons of others of Saul's wives or concubines, but not in line to rule.

As far as heirs of the dynasty go, Mephibosheth is it. We should see parallels here with the story of Eli and Ichabod back in 1 Samuel chapter 4, after the news of the loss of the battle of Aphek. There Eli fell, like Mephibosheth, and Ichabod's life was marked by the

day of his father and grandfather's death, in being called, The Glory Has Departed.

Mephibosheth bears the mark of the day of his father and grandfather's death, both in having a name implying the departure of glory, like his uncle Ishbosheth and Ichabod before them both, and in the lameness that resulted from his fall. In these regards he also symbolises his father's house, and invites us to compare Saul's house with Eli's. Mephibosheth was five years old when he escaped after hearing the news of Saul's defeat.

He would have been 12 or 13 when David became king of all Israel. David's summoning of Mephibosheth likely occurred at some point before he was 20. Mephibosheth is living in Lodabah, in the realm of Transjordanian Manasseh.

His location, Lodabah, means nothing or no word, and it might suggest the very low profile that he was keeping. This is within the region where Saul's son Ishbosheth had established his kingdom, but it's not central to it. Mephibosheth, as the son of the former king, is a person who represents a threat, simply by virtue of who he is.

Even though he himself is lame, and perhaps even disqualified from occupying the throne on that account, he could bear legitimate heirs to the Saulide dynasty. The destruction and extinction of the Saulide dynasty in death and barrenness has been the way that things have been moving for the past few chapters, and there is a fragile remnant left in Mephibosheth. At this point David holds almost all of the power.

If he wanted, it wouldn't be hard finally to extinguish Saul's house, never to have to worry about it rising up again. There are several such attempts to extinguish ruling households in scripture, so David would have had precedent. In the rebellion of Absalom, a few chapters later in the narrative, we get a sense of the potential threat Mephibosheth could have represented, even if only as a defector who could grant legitimacy to an opponent of David.

It might have been expedient for David not to kill Mephibosheth, maintaining some peace with the remnants of Saul's loyalists would be a good way to maintain unity in Israel, but ideally he would want to ensure that Mephibosheth was kept very weak and kept under his sight. The fact that Mephibosheth has all of the land of Saul restored to him, and is presumably also given a wife so that he has a son called Micah, is an indication that is not merely defanging and chaining Saul's remaining heir so that he can keep a potential enemy under his thumb. The fact that Saul's servant Zeba has 15 sons and 20 servants is an indication that he isn't a lowly servant, but a fairly powerful steward with a number of wives, much property of his own and a large household.

That he will now serve Mephibosheth as the heir of Saul might suggest the extent of the wealth and power that David restored to Mephibosheth, Mephibosheth is significant, not merely as a remnant of the house of Saul, he is far more significant as the son of

Jonathan. David was concerned to keep his covenant with Jonathan, who was David's brother-in-law and closest friend, showing loving kindness to those remaining of his house. Jonathan had recognised that David was going to inherit the throne, and completely supported and showed loyalty to David.

Jonathan's father Saul also recognised that David would get the throne, but he tried to destroy David on that account. After Saul was judged by the Lord, the Lord has shown considerable mercy to him in bringing his appointed successor into his house as his son-in-law. Saul had the opportunity to support David as his successor and to be blessed on David's account, yet he fought against him instead.

Jonathan by contrast had supported David. In the raising up of Mephibosheth, Jonathan's reception of the grace that God gave to Saul in his judgment upon him bears fruit. By joining David, Mephibosheth and others of Saul's house could be saved from the death and judgment of the house of Saul.

David had been adopted into the household of Saul, and had presented the opportunity of saving Saul's household. Here Mephibosheth enjoys a sort of adoption into David's he eats at the king's table, along with and like the king's sons. The remnants of the house of Saul are faced with a choice in the posture that they will take towards the house of David.

They can oppose it and suffer the Lord's judgment. Michael had formally joined David, but then suffered judgment from the Lord for her despising of David, being cut off in barrenness. Mephibosheth is raised up here, although he will later be tested at the time of Absalom's coup.

Zeba will also be tested, and he will fail, as he takes advantage of his position when he sees the chance. A question to consider, how might David's loving kindness towards Mephibosheth reflect the Lord's loving kindness towards him, and illustrate the Lord's loving kindness towards us? Philippians chapter 2 verses 12-30 Therefore my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now not only as in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run or labour in vain. Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your

welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also. I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother, and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need.

For he has been longing for you all, and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. Indeed he was ill, near to death, but God had mercy on him, and not only on him, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I am the more eager to send him therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious.

So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men. For he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me. The second half of Philippians chapter 2 continues the point that Paul has been making since chapter 1 verse 27.

Paul is concerned that the Philippians live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, in a manner that is fitting to the grace that they have received, and to the master that they serve. In the first half of Philippians chapter 2 Paul put forward Christ as an example of the mindset that they should follow, showing humility in the way that they treat each other, not seeking their own advantage or engaging in self-aggrandizement, but taking concern for each other and pursuing a loving unity. When we talk about salvation, our discussions of it tend to be dominated by the big question of whether someone is in or out.

As a result we often find ourselves wrong-footed by the teaching on the subject in the New Testament. Here for instance, when Paul talks about working out your own salvation with fear and trembling, the instinctive response from many is fear of works righteousness and the idea of earning one's own salvation. However, a very great deal that salvation involves isn't concerned with the question of whether one is in or out, with how one gets in, or even whether you need to act in a particular way to stay in.

Rather, salvation is a term that relates to a far broader reality, and we can lose a very great deal when we are simply narrowly fixated upon whether we are in or not. Immensely important though that concern may be in its proper place. Perhaps we could compare this to a child who has been wonderfully delivered from life on the streets by being adopted into a rich and loving family.

By the formal process of adoption they become part of the family, they are now in. However, the whole point of adoption is not the bare formality of being technically in, but the rich reality of fellowship, love, security, dignity and authorisation that the adopted child enjoys as they live out what it means to be in. A child that was very concerned to

know whether he was technically adopted, but largely ignored his adoptive parents, showed no eagerness to join the family at the meal table, and consistently behaved in a stubborn and rebellious manner, would be making a mockery of the reality of adoption, whatever his technical status.

Likewise, the content of salvation is not so much the narrow concern of whether or not we are technically in, conceived of as little more than a matter of knowing that we aren't going to be eternally alienated from God. It is the enjoyment of true peace and communion with God, living as those engaged in our father's business as sons and daughters of God, experiencing the renewal of our desires and wills by the work of the indwelling spirit, knowing relief from guilty conscience in full and free forgiveness, living in actual fellowship with God and our neighbours, etc. etc.

This is what being in is all about, and we get to experience all of this now to some degree through the down payment of the spirit, in a foretaste of what we will one day know in fuller measure. Here Paul is concerned to impress upon the Philippians the importance of entering into the fullness of the salvation that they have been granted in Christ. This is something that they need to work out.

We should all be growing in our knowledge of God's salvation and maturing in our living it out over time. We should be living in ways that express the release from bondage that we have been given in Christ. Paul doesn't want the Philippians merely to do this for his inspection, so that he won't rebuke them.

In his absence as well as in his presence, this should be something that they are pursuing for its own sake. If we have besetting sins in our lives, we should be working out our salvation there. If we have struggles with fear, despair or discouragement, we should be working out our salvation there.

If we lack assurance, we should be working out our salvation there. If we are alienated from a brother or sister, we should be working out our salvation there. If our love for Christ is weak, we should be working out our salvation there.

If we do not find joy in meditating upon the things of God, or if our prayer life is lacking, we should be working out our salvation there. None of this is done as those who are trying to earn our standing with God, we have been given that. Rather, our concern must be to receive most fully the gift of God's grace that we have been given, to enter into the very fullest possession of it.

We must do all of this with fear and trembling, as those who have received the most incredible mercy and grace, and as those who are living in the presence of a holy God. The fear and trembling does not result from the doubtfulness of God's favour towards us, from the possibility that God is looking for a chance to trip us up, or to withdraw his grace as soon as we fail. No, as Paul goes on to argue, we should act in fear and

trembling as God himself is at work in us.

God's grace is active within us to enable us both to desire what is good and to do it. God is restoring us in, and enabling us to grow in, truthful ways of life. We must be concerned not to receive his gifts in vain, not to treat the grace of our Creator as a light thing.

We must treasure and pursue his grace, seeking to enter into the fullest measure of it. Mourner Hooker suggests that Paul plays off the background of Moses' farewell discourses in Deuteronomy here, in a way that contrasts with Moses' teaching to the unfaithful Israelites. Moses had compared the Israelites' behaviour in his presence with the way that they would behave when he left the scene, in chapter 31, verse 27 of Deuteronomy.

For I know how rebellious and stubborn you are. Behold, even today, when I am yet alive with you, you have been rebellious against the Lord. How much more after my death! Paul's statement to the Philippians in verse 12 is in many ways the complete inverse of this.

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence, but much more in my absence. Again, Moses describes the Israelites in Deuteronomy 32, verse 5. They have dealt corruptly with him. They are no longer his children, because they are blemished.

They are a crooked and twisted generation. The Philippians, however, are not blemished members of a crooked and twisted generation, but children of God without blemish, in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation. At the end of the book of Deuteronomy, the unfaithfulness of Israel was a tragic reality that would doom them to experience the full measure of the curse of the covenant.

However, there was the promise held out that, after the curse of the covenant had come upon them, the Lord would circumcise their hearts and the hearts of their children, so that as God restored them, they would serve him aright. Perhaps Paul is echoing and inverting the text of Deuteronomy, because he wants the Philippians to recognize that, in the new covenant, which they are experiencing here and now, all of this is taking place. The Philippians are charged to do all things without grumbling or disputing.

Grumbling and disputing were, of course, the most characteristic sins of the wilderness generation. Unlike the wilderness generation, who failed to enter into possession of the salvation that God held out to them, the Philippians must hold fast to the word of life, persevering in the way of Christ, so that on the day of the Lord, when our salvation is consummated in Christ's unveiling, Paul's efforts on their behalf would not turn out to have been in vain. As they conduct themselves in a righteous manner, holding fast to Christ's word of life, they will shine like lights in the world, displaying this truth to others.



Paul's statements to the Israelites were given in the context of his farewell discourse, and here Paul's thoughts seem to turn to the possibility of his own departure in martyrdom. Paul presents his possible martyrdom as a sort of drink offering upon the offering of the Philippians' faith. Together, Paul and the Philippians are engaged in an act of sacrificial worship in their response to God's grace in the gospel.

Even if Paul's death is imminent, the worthiness of making such a sacrifice gives him cause to rejoice, a rejoicing that he requests that the Philippians join him in. Paul's hope is to send Timothy to the Philippians soon. Timothy is Paul's sheliach, the one who personally represents Paul where Paul himself cannot be.

As such, Timothy participates in the exercise of Paul's apostolic ministry. He is the co-author of epistles, 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philemon. He is Paul's personal emissary, as we see in Acts 19 and 1 Timothy 1 verse 3. He is the one who served Paul, so that Paul could give himself to his primary task of preaching without any distraction.

Timothy participated directly in Paul's exercise of his apostolic power. Paul and Timothy are a pair, bound together in a single apostolic mission. On occasions the distinction between them is made plain.

Only Paul is the apostle proper, while on others their alignment and association is stressed. Timothy is a co-worker, helper, and sharer in Paul's calling. Relative to the churches to which they were ministering, Timothy was to be treated as a bearer of Paul's own authority.

However, relative to Paul, Timothy was a subordinate, without an independent commission of his own, but rather a share in Paul's. The relationship between Paul and Timothy is exceptionally close, and Paul speaks of Timothy as his own son. This language is not merely that of emotional closeness, but of representation.

The son represents the father, his authority, his presence, and his interests. It also points to a relationship similar to that which pertained between Old Testament leaders and prophets and their shaliaks. In Numbers chapter 13 verse 16, we see that Joshua's name was given to him by Moses, who also laid his hands on Joshua in Deuteronomy chapter 34 verse 9. A similar relationship exists between Elijah and Elisha.

Elisha receives a double portion of Elijah's spirit, the inheritance appropriate to the firstborn, and as Elijah is taken into heaven, Elisha addresses him as his father. On this subject, Matt Calvin writes, Timothy is sent. This is the hallmark of an apostle or shaliak.

Indeed, both nouns have their roots in the respective verbs, to send. Philippians chapter 2 verse 20, I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. Paul sends Timothy to the Corinthians in 1

Corinthians chapter 16 verse 10, stating that he is to do the same job as Paul himself.

If Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear, for he does the work of the Lord, as I also do. Therefore let no one despise him. Timothy's work is the same as Paul's.

On several other occasions, Paul mentions that Timothy is doing the work of the Lord, or is a fellow worker with me, or a fellow worker with God. I would suggest that these terms should be taken as vivid expressions of the shaliak role. First of all, as an apostle sent by God or Christ to do Christ's work, and then by Timothy, who, sent by Paul as Paul's own shaliak, is likewise engaged in the same work as his master, and is thus, as it were, a second order shaliak of Christ.

He is referred to by Paul as my fellow worker in Romans chapter 16 verse 21. 1 Timothy chapter 4 verse 6 refers to Timothy as a servant of Christ Jesus. It is unclear whether this is a more general appellation, or refers to his role as the delegate of Christ's delegate.

Nonetheless, the point is clear. Timothy is Paul's plenipotentiary emissary, not a local pastor. He stands on one side with Paul as Christ's representative, not on the other side with the seven and other elders as the church's representative.

He goes on to observe that Timothy is a virtual copy of Paul, as underlined by 1 Corinthians chapter 4 verses 16 to 17. I urge you, imitate me. For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.

The charge to imitate Paul is accompanied by the sending of Timothy towards the fulfilment of this end, as the son is the preeminent imitator and representation of the father. As a participant in his father's ministry, and as Paul's right-hand man, Timothy had immense authority to wield, even being given the commission to choose and appoint church officers as Paul's representative on occasions. As the apostolic ministry was temporary, upon Paul's death Timothy would presumably have ceased to be the apostle's apostle, and would presumably have become a bishop.

Paul has also determined to send Epaphroditus to the Philippians. He is another fellow worker with a close relationship to Paul. Paul gives a three-fold description of Epaphroditus' relationship to him.

Brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, evoking different key governing metaphors for thinking about the church and the service of Christ within it. The church is a family, and fellow members are our brothers and sisters. The ministry of the church is like labour in a field or in a building, and our companions are fellow workers.

The church is engaged in a battle against principalities and powers, and fighting against enemies within and without, and our comrades in this struggle are fellow soldiers.

Epaphroditus was presumably one of the Philippians himself, and had borne the Philippians' gift to Paul earlier. In prison, Paul would be dependent upon support from friends and relatives, and Epaphroditus had provided such support from the Philippians.

However, he had fallen very seriously ill, which the Philippians had heard about. Both Epaphroditus and the Philippians were deeply distressed by the other party's distress. God had granted Epaphroditus healing though, and now Paul is sending him back to the Philippians so that they might rejoice to be reunited with their brother.

In their rejoicing, Paul himself would be enriched, even though he would lose Epaphroditus' presence with him, as the blessing of others in Christ is something that blesses us all. Paul is concerned that Epaphroditus, who is likely bearing the letter, be welcomed back with joy and honour. He is a faithful servant, who has been obedient in the work of Christ almost to the point of death, following the example of his master.

Those who perform the work of Christ at such personal cost are worthy of honour. A question to consider. How does the concern that people work out their salvation mark Paul's work more generally?