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2 Samuel 9:1-8; 2 Samuel 9:12,13; 2 Samuel 17:27-29; 2 Samuel 19:24-40

I want to speak, dear brethren, of the true grace of God, and how we respond to it at the present time. In Peter's first epistle we have the expression, "the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ Jesus". I wonder whether we have any true apprehension of what is involved in that. Christ Jesus is the Man, as we often say, of God's pleasure and purpose. In His Person, God has entered into manhood, in order that Man of an extremely exalted and glorious order might come into being, and that, redemption being accomplished, we might, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, be set up in the life of that Man; not only to enjoy His place before God, but actually to be set up in the life and features of the Man Christ Jesus.

It is a glorious conception that God should have such a thought before His mind, that manhood taking character from Christ, whom Scripture speaks of as the second Man out of heaven, should be before Him in myriads of saints who have part in the life of Christ, who have been formed in His moral features, and who will soon be even conformed to His body of glory. You can easily understand what a scene of glory it will be when it comes into display. God gives us some impression of these holy things in the physical universe. We look up to the heavens and see the stars. Astronomers tell us that with more powerful telescopes we can see more stars, and the more powerful the telescope, the greater the number of stars to be seen, until you are impressed with the wonder and extent of the scene.

The scripture uses the stars to present to our minds what is figurative of the saints. It says, "star differs from star in glory", but they are all glorious, though each is different. Star differs from star in glory, then it says that God numbers all the stars, calls them forth by their host, not one faileth. Then it says in Psalm 147 that He gives names to them all. Each one has its own distinction, and that is just a picture, intended to give us an impression of the world of glory to which God has called us, composed of saints like Christ; not simply like Him in an outward way, but formed by the Spirit in His own moral features of heavenly perfection. So that Paul as he was nearing the end of his course was entranced by the light of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus. He said his desire was to know Him, and not only to know Him, but to be found in Him. Think of being found, dear brethren, as we shall be, in Christ Jesus - not a trace left of the old, but all the moral glory attaching to Christ seen in the saints, each one of them, and all of them together. Think of the grandeur of the glory that is before us - that to which God has called us - His eternal glory.

He has called us to it. The gospel, when it reached us, was His means of making the call effective in our souls. We had little idea at the time when we believed the gospel that it was the call of God to such great things. We were concerned at that time with the question of the need of our souls and having peace with God on a righteous basis; but God is beginning to show us that when the call was made effective in us He had nothing less in mind than His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, and God, in devising such things, and calling us in relation to them, had in mind His own pleasure, on the one hand; and the display of Himself - the expression of His glory - on the other.

It is right that He should be glorified. One of our hymns says

O Mind divine, so must it be
That glory all belongs to God! (88:5)

That is a very true statement, almost an inspired statement, you might say. It is so concise and so expressive; it must be so, that glory all belongs to God. It is morally right that it should be so, and God has in mind that He should be glorified, and glorified in us, in the saints, so He has called us to His eternal glory in Christ Jesus.

Now the epistle to the Ephesians opens all this up in detail; not that I have any thought of going into the epistle to the Ephesians, save just to quote one passage from the second chapter. You remember how it says that, "God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love wherewith he loved us (we too being dead in offences,) has quickened us with the Christ (ye are saved by grace,) and has raised us up together, and has made us sit down together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, that he might display in the coming ages the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus", Ephesians 2: 4 - 7. Raised up together and made to sit down together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus - that refers to our being consciously before God in Christ Jesus, in restful conditions. Notice the 'together'. We were having it this morning, the importance of the new covenant as not only setting us at liberty before God, but setting us at liberty with one another, not a shade of feeling against a brother or sister maintained in any heart, because of the way God has come out to us, "rich in mercy, because of his great love ...".

So then, dear brethren, if that is so, we can be together, and by the Spirit's power, be held under the influence of the love of Christ, and know something of what it is to be made to sit down together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. Well now, the end in view in all that is that God might display the exceeding riches of His grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. It would not be right to limit the thought of the grace of God to that, but it does convey some idea

to us of the true grace of God wherein we stand, to quote another expression Peter uses in his epistle.

I read the incident as to Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 9, because that, to my mind, exactly illustrates what we have quoted from Ephesians 2. Indeed we get this same expression in the chapter, "the kindness of God". In Ephesians it is that He might display the exceeding riches of His grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus, and David is moved to do something to someone of the house of Saul, that he might show the kindness of God to him. The servant of Saul, Ziba, is brought in, and David enquires of him as to whether there are any left of the house of Saul, that he may show the kindness of God to him. So Ziba says, "Jonathan has yet a son, who is lame on his feet" - nothing in him exactly to commend him; not attractive in himself; but a suitable object for the kindness of God to be shown to him, that God might be glorified thus. And so Mephibosheth is sent for, and David tells him that he should have his place at David's table continually - to sit there, at the king's table. What could be greater in Israel at that time than to sit down at the king's table? He is to eat bread at the king's table continually. Not simply on a special occasion, as invited, but it was to be his continual position. Well, that is very much like chapter 2 of Ephesians, and this history is given to us that we might get an impression of this true grace of God.

You picture to yourself king David's table, with his sons there, as belonging to that position - entitled to it, and Mephibosheth brought there among the king's sons, to sit there with them. That is exactly our position, as raised up together and made to sit down together, in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus.

Mephibosheth has a deep sense of mercy and of grace. He says, "What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?" That is in keeping with the second of Ephesians, "we being dead in offences". There was nothing in us to commend us to God, no pulsation of life Godward. "A dead dog" is really our description, but in those conditions, God has quickened us with the Christ. He has made us to live. He has wrought in our souls affection for Christ, and given us to understand that in the love of Christ, and in the grace of God, our position is henceforth for ever to be with Christ, as He says, "Father, as to those whom thou hast given me, I desire that where I am they also may be with me", John 17: 24. Nothing could be greater. We may rest assured that, if we are to be with Christ for ever, we are to be there in conditions suited to such elevation and glory, and nothing would be suitable to such elevation and glory short of being exactly like Christ, morally conformed to Him, and actually conformed to Him as to our bodies. The work of moral conformation is going on now by the work of the Holy Spirit, who loves to engage the hearts of the saints with perfection in Christ.

You can see much in the way of spiritual formation that is morally glorious if we consider the apostle Paul, for the Spirit of God allows Paul to present himself as a model and an example. He says, "Be my imitators, even as I also am of Christ". So that the Spirit of God allows us to have Paul as a model, and Paul presents himself in his ministry as a model, in order that we may see how far the work of God can go in one of like passions as ourselves. At the same time, we can see a certain element of weakness or defect in Paul, but, when we come to Jesus, there is no defect. You see perfection there. Hence, while we can look at Paul as a model, at the same time he will direct our thoughts to Christ.

You remember how in Acts 20 he spoke to the elders of Ephesus, who had come over to Miletus to meet him, and he goes over what his ministry had been, and then refers to what he himself had been - how he had served the saints so sacrificially. His own hands - "these hands", he said - had ministered to his necessities and those who were with him. Great apostle though he was, he did not shrink from actually serving those who were with him, working with his own hands to minister to their necessities, setting forth love in practical expression in that way. But then he did not leave them only with the remembrance of what he had been - he did tell them what he had been, showing that these things could be worked out to an extraordinary extent in one of like passions as themselves - but, having spoken of himself, he says, "and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive". It is as though, as they were directed in their attention to Paul, he in his turn directed their attention to Christ, as the One from whom he had learnt all that there was in him by the work of God that was pleasing to God.

So Mephibosheth takes this place before David, of being a dead dog, and that with a right sense of mercy and grace. He accepts the position, that is clear. Some years later Mephibosheth is questioned by David, as to why he did not go with him, when he fled from Absalom, and it is clear from what Mephibosheth says that he is valuing in his soul the position he has at the king's table. He is not surrendering that, he is cherishing it, and it is for all of us to understand that the position God has given us is irrevocable - He has raised us up together and made us sit down together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. That is not a question of what is future, it is a question of what is present. He has done it, it is not simply a question of what is in His mind; it is a question of what can be realised now in the measure in which there is power for it in our souls by the Holy Spirit, as we are together in assembly.

And so we read at the end of this chapter that "Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem; for he did eat continually at the king's table" - *continually*. I trust that if the Lord leaves us here till tomorrow, we shall know something of this - sitting down together, eating together, at the king's table you might say, enjoying the best things conceivable that divine love and the love of Christ can give us; that is our position. Mephibosheth dwelt there continually, and he was lame on both his feet - not that there will be any defect carried over into eternity, but there was the great sense with Mephibosheth, I have no doubt, that all was of grace, as it says in Ephesians a, "Ye are saved by grace".

Then there is another thing, it says that he had a young son, whose name was Mica. Mephibosheth, so to speak, is continued in his son, and he has this name Mica, which means, "Who is like God?" Who is like God? You can understand that everywhere Mica went, people who heard his name thought about it, and that would redound to the glory of God. Mica was, so to speak, the continuation of Mephibosheth. Mephibosheth is the one to whom the grace is expressed; Mica is the other side - that the expression of grace results in God being glorified. So wherever Mephibosheth goes, so to speak, as continued in his son, the question is raised in people's minds, "Who is like God?" What a God He is! "God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love wherewith he loved us", and then, "that he might display in the coming ages the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus". Who is like God? That is what we have been taken up for, to minister to the pleasure of God, on the one hand, and to be an expression of the glory of God, on the other.

In the chapters that follow in this book, the position changes. Almost immediately after chapter 9 we read of the great breakdown, the great failure in David's history, and David from then onwards at any rate, is not exactly a type of Christ, but rather a type of the name of Christ here in testimony. The name of Christ is here in testimony, but there is a good deal connected with the public testimony to Christ which is dishonouring, which is grievous, and that is what exactly corresponds with David in the second part of this second book of Samuel. It is not a question, as I have said, of his typifying Christ personally, but rather his typifying the name of Christ here in testimony. But notwithstanding everything it is going through in triumph. God is going to see that it goes through; but with some of us there is a good deal that is sorrowful. It certainly was so with David, for there was the most grievous breakdown on his part in chapter ii, and from then onwards there is a great deal of sorrow and conflict. Indeed Absalom arises against him - his own son. Absalom, I suppose, represents the principle of antichrist accepted in the Christian profession. That is to say, room is made in the great Christian

profession, where the name of Christ is professed, for the first man in his natural attractiveness. That is what Absalom sets forth. From the crown of his head to the sole of his feet there was no blemish in him. In all Israel there was no one so much praised as Absalom for his beauty, and yet he was a murderer - a murderer! His manner was in keeping with his outward attractiveness, so that he stole the hearts of the men of Israel, but in his heart he was opposed to Christ, and opposed to all that is pleasing to God. And now, alas, David makes room for Absalom. As king, he should have had Absalom executed, for Absalom was a murderer. Instead of that, David allows him to come back, and actually kisses him. So you can see what a serious breakdown there is in this part of the history, and the result of all that is that eventually, for the moment, Absalom gets the upper hand and David has to flee. And that brings into view our present position in the testimony, connected with the name of Christ - that the great public profession has made way for the first man and made no room for Christ, so that the Lord Jesus is in an outside position as regards the testimony to His name. Thank God, that by the grace of God we are found in the position with Him.

Thus this book is very interesting, showing the different individuals that come into view now, and how they stand out, either as faithful to David, or unfaithful; in some cases faithful right through to an extraordinary extent, in others faithful up to a point, but not going the whole length. It raises the question as to whether we are going the whole length in faithful ness to Christ or not. The history is extremely valuable on that account.

And so we find that David is in rejection and we come to the passage we read in chapter 17, where we have certain ones coming forward who are faithful to David. Their names are given us, Shobi, the son of Nahash of Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and Machir the son of Ammiel of Lo-debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite of Rogelim. The second of these was the very same man in whose house Mephibosheth had been found. He had harboured Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul. He showed kindness to him. At the same time, it looks as though he was affected by David's having shown kindness to Mephibosheth, seeing that Mephibosheth was the grandson of Saul, the great enemy of David. It seems as though perhaps Machir was affected by the kindness that David showed Mephibosheth. The result is that now, when David is in rejection, Machir comes out as one of those who minister to him. And so there are these men who shine in faithfulness to David in his rejection. I read the passage more particularly because of Barzillai, because he is one of those whose history needs to be followed up with attention. But see what these people did. They "brought beds, and basons, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched corn, and beans, and lentils, and parched

pulse, and honey, and cream, and sheep, and cheese of kine to David, and to the people that were with him, to eat”.

Why does the Spirit of God go into all that detail? Why should He go into such extraordinary detail as to what they brought? It only shows in what a variety of ways we can support the testimony of our Lord, and those who are committed to it as sharing His rejection.

There is surely something in all these things that any one of us can bring. I believe that is the idea, to show that there is a variety of ways in which we can minister to the support of the testimony of our Lord, as identified with those who seek to be faithful to Him, in His rejection - there is a variety of ways in which we can minister to Him. Hence are we going to avail ourselves of the privilege? - it is a privilege. You remember earlier in the history of David, when he was still fleeing from Saul, how Abigail comes to light, and what marked her is that she brought great wealth. She brought a great deal of wealth with her, and it was to be given to the young men that followed David, and then when she learned that David had sent to take her to be his wife, she says, “Let thy handmaid be a bondwoman, to wash the feet of the servants of my lord”. What a beautiful spirit that is! How open it is to us all to take it on, here in this present time. For the saints as committed to the name of the Lord Jesus, and sharing his rejection at the present time, are exposed to a great deal of testing and of trial and therefore anything we can do to wash their feet, to bring in refreshment, to bring in encouragement, to bring in stimulation, let us be ready to do it. Love would do it. The Lord Himself condescended, in wonderful grace, to wash the feet of His disciples. And if we are found moving in the same spirit, washing the feet of those who love Christ and desire to be faithful to Him, we are by that very fact taking on the character of Christ. Something of what belongs to the “in Christ Jesus” position is being formed in us in these very circumstances.

Think of the possibilities then; do not let us miss the possibilities of the present time, this great possibility of ministering to the needs connected with the name of the Lord in testimony here, when it is in a suffering position, owing to the rejection of Christ; so as I say, the Spirit of God enumerates all the different things that are brought, in order, I believe, to show that there is something that each one of us can do or bring.

But now, when we come to the other chapter that we read, we have Mephibosheth brought in, and Barzillai. Mephibosheth is a most interesting case. In chapter 19 it looks as though David was somewhat deceived. In chapter 16 we read that Ziba had come down to David, and had maligned Mephibosheth. He had told David that Mephibosheth was abiding at

Jerusalem, in the expectation that the house of Israel would restore to him the kingdom of his father. He had slandered Mephibosheth to David - there was not a word of truth in what he said, as is clear from the condition in which Mephibosheth is seen, when at last he meets David, as David is being brought back. From the day that David had gone forth from Jerusalem, Mephibosheth had neither washed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes. He certainly would not have acted thus if he had been in the expectation that the kingdom would be restored to him. He certainly would not have taken that attitude. It was an attitude that showed without question that David was in his heart, and that, whilst David was in rejection, he would mourn, he would fast, as the Lord Himself said on one occasion, "Days will come when also the bridegroom will have been taken away from them; then shall they fast in those days". And that is what becomes us now, dear brethren, in the absence of Christ, in the day of His rejection. What becomes us is to be like Mephibosheth, to feel the absence of Christ and to realise that our life is so bound up with Christ that it is a time of fasting until the Lord comes.

And so Mephibosheth is marked by unswerving fidelity to David. David apparently does not altogether accept his story. Or at any rate, he had accepted Ziba's story and said that all that belonged to Mephibosheth Ziba might have. Now David alters that but goes half-way. He says, "I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land".

David is weak here; he is not giving Mephibosheth all his rights, but it only serves to bring out how completely Mephibosheth's heart is bound up with David. The answer he gives is magnificent. It shows how real was his devotion to David. He says, "Let him even take all, since my lord the king is come again in peace to his own house". But then before that he had said, verse 28, "all my father's house were but dead men, before my lord the king; and thou didst set thy servant among them that eat at thine own table", showing that he valued that position. He was not going to give it up.

The question is whether we value our position, dear brethren. On the one hand, in the public position, we are identified with Christ in His rejection, and we must accept that and be prepared to accept fasting until the Lord comes. On the other hand, we are to cherish above everything the position grace has given us, that it has made us sit down together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. And Mephibosheth is clinging to that; he was not giving it up. He was rejoicing in it, but he was content that as to himself he should have nothing, if only David came into his rightful place.

But now in Barzillai a further consideration comes into view. He had been very faithful to David in the wilderness position. In the day of his rejection he had

been faithful. And the present rejection of Christ affords plenty of opportunity to be faithful to His name, and to show our faithfulness to His name by serving, in any way that is open to us, the saints who are desirous of also being faithful to Him.

But now there is another movement, David is crossing the Jordan, he is coming back into his own. It is now a picture of the truth taking on a spiritual character. There is the side of the public position, where we are identified with a rejected Christ and have to suffer in consequence in greater or less degree, but we are tested by the spiritual character of the ministry, when the Lord does get His place in the affections of His own.

David was passing over Jordan, going up to Jerusalem, He wants Barzillai to go with him, but Barzillai is but little prepared for it. It is very sorrowful to find a man so outstandingly faithful to David in his rejection, but not prepared to go forward into what is spiritual. For that is what this refers to.

Jordan is death upon man. The acceptance of death in order to make way for the Holy Spirit and His things. The acceptance of death upon what is natural so that we do not treasure what is natural but find our life in the things that are connected with Christ where He is. The acceptance of death provides the way for the Spirit to gain His place in our minds and hearts in a practical way. And if we are not prepared to accept death we shall find that the Spirit of God has not much liberty with us.

The secret of everything is how far in our affections we are bound up with Christ. The Lord says, "I am coming again and shall receive you to myself, that where I am ye also may be". His affections are bound up with us, or rather, I should put it the other way round, that on His side He desires that we should be bound up with Himself. He says, "I am coming again and shall receive you to *myself*, that where I *am* ye also may be". Not, 'I am coming to take you to heaven', not, 'I am coming to make you happy', but I am coming that you may have a part with Me for ever. That is the language of the Lord and then, when He speaks to His Father, He says, "Father, as to those whom thou hast given me, I desire that where I am they also may be with me". That is the language of Christ.

Have we taken it up in our hearts? Are we bound up in our affections with Christ? Is the hymn that we sometimes sing true of us, 'No place can fully please us where Thou, O Lord, art not'? That is the language of one who is bound up in his heart with Christ, and that is the secret of passing over Jordan; that we cannot rest in being anywhere where Christ is not. We have got the sense that the love of Christ claims the assembly for Himself and He

wants us to be with Him where He is, and it is in the power of that love that we are given entrance already into spiritual and heavenly things.

And so David says to Barzillai, "Pass thou over with me, and I will maintain thee with me in Jerusalem" - I will maintain thee, what a proposal that was! He says, "Pass thou over with me". That is the secret, with *me*. If you read the second and third chapters of Colossians, you will find that the great point is, "with Christ". Colossians is the epistle that speaks of our passing over Jordan, and the power to pass over Jordan is to get in our souls the idea of "with Christ". Dead with Christ, buried with Him, raised with Him, quickened with Him, and so on. It is all "with Christ" in Colossians, and the more we get the sense of that, that the love of Christ will not rest content with anything short of our being with Him,

the more we shall be prepared to open ourselves to the Spirit to find our life in the things that are above. It is not that, while we are here, the natural has to be discarded altogether, but it is to be superseded as that in which our affections lie.

So David appeals to Barzillai, he says, "Pass thou over with me, and I will maintain thee". That is to say, if we are prepared to accept death, then we shall find that we are maintained. The grace of Christ and the power of the Spirit will maintain us in the living enjoyment of things that are above, spiritual and heavenly things.

Now Barzillai says, "How many are the days of the years of my life, that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem? ... Can I discern between good and bad? can thy servant taste what I eat and what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women?" and so on. He has lost his taste. What a sad thing it is if we lose our taste for spiritual things - the things of Christ. He has lost his hearing. What a sad thing that is! The Spirit says, "He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies". We do not want to be among those who have lost their hearing. I am not speaking, of course, of physical hearing - I am speaking of hearing in the spiritual sense. "He that *has* an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies". It is a question of being prepared in our affections to pass over, to have part with Christ in things which are spiritual and heavenly and eternal, and to enjoy them now in the power of the Holy Spirit.

But Barzillai had lost his taste. He says, "Thy servant will go a little way over". As though he would say, 'Yes, I don't mind; I like enjoying the meetings a little bit, but I don't want to find my life in these things'. His heart is hankering after his father's grave and his mother's grave. Think of a man having a *grave* as his outlook! His father's grave and his mother's grave. Think of the power of what

is natural having such a hold on a man that he prefers his father's grave and his mother's grave to being in Jerusalem with David. What a sorrowful thing it is!

It just shows, dear brethren, that if we do not cultivate what is spiritual, we may drop out, so far as having a living part in things is concerned, just when things are reaching their very best. David was going back to Jerusalem; things were going to be restored; it was a day of recovery, of restoration, and he wanted Barzillai to be with him in it.

And so Barzillai says, "Behold thy servant Chimham, let *him* go over with my lord the king". We are not told, but I think we gather the impression that Chimham was probably Barzillai's son. We read in 1 Kings 2 that David specially gives a charge to Solomon to see that the sons of Barzillai are among those who sit at Solomon's table. He gives him a special charge because of Barzillai's faithfulness. The Lord never forgets any faithfulness to His Name we can rest assured of that. At the same time, His heart feels it if we are not prepared to go all the way, to go with Him into the enjoyment of what is truly spiritual. And so he says to Barzillai, "Chimham shall go over with me, and I will do to him that which seems good to thee", and so on. The name of Chimham means 'longing'. The more we learn how to yield ourselves to the Spirit of God and not allow what is natural to have undue place with us, the more we shall find that spiritual longings are developed with us, and if there are spiritual longings developed with us, the Lord and the Spirit will be more than ready to satisfy those longings.

That is all I had in mind, dear brethren; first of all, that we might get a sense of the true grace of God, what it has done for us, raised us up together and made us sit down together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. And then that we might see what our response to it is to be. First of all, in the public position, where the rejection of Christ has to be accepted; whether we are faithful to Christ there and using our time in serving in love those who are bound up with His name in that position. And then, secondly, the more testing question, as to whether we are prepared to lend ourselves entirely to that which is spiritual, so as to have part in a living way with all that the Lord is sustaining at the present time in the way of response to the blessed God. May the Lord bless the word to us.

A. J. Gardiner Ilford, May 10th, 1958.