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Amazing Grace! II Samuel 9

It is the young boys birthday. His father has built for him an incredible fort in medieval castle style, complete with walls, towers and turrets big enough to stand in. On the largest walls the father has mounted real 1/8th scale cannons. The father asks the boy to stand outside the fort and receive the birthday cannon salute. Outside the boy stands shaking and begins to cry..He didn't realize the cannons would be shooting blanks. He misunderstood, fearing that his father would be shooting him, when in reality..His father did not want to shoot him but desired to honor him.

You would think the boy would know the father well enough..to know that he would never shoot his son, but in all the anticipation of his birthday, the boy had been less than obedient to his mother and had spent a good part of the day terrorizing to his younger brother, cowering under the threat, "Wait till your father gets home!" He feared being shot was his punishment. While the boy feared punishment, the father wanted to honor him and demonstrate grace of a 12 cannon birthday salute.

I hear many stories about people growing up in homes where love and affection were handed out only if your performance was good. If you brought home good grades, if you were the pretty one in the family, if you said the clever things and hit the homeruns, if you could keep your room cleaned up and stay out of trouble..then love and affection were granted. If you didn't measure up or have the talents your parents wanted you painfully felt the distance. Maybe some of you grew up in such a home. You were being taught that love is based on performance. That will strain the life out of any relationship.

We tend to drag our same concepts of performance based acceptance into our relationship with God. If you are at all like me, we are constantly learning about God's amazing grace. I tend to think that God will accept me and love me based on relatively how well I have

performed. How relatively free of sin I've managed to keep myself. How relatively well I've treated those I rub elbows with, my family, my friends. I tend base my acceptance based on my performance. If I feel like I've been relatively holy that week, then I am expecting to be relatively blessed with a good day. It's all relative...it depends on how I feel I've compared with others around me. When we blow it, we tell ourselves..at least I'm not as bad as she is. If I feel like I've really made a royal mess of the week...then I tend to fear the punishment of a holy God. I know in my mind that God loves me the sinner no matter what. I know in my mind that I can't do anything to make him love me more or less. But sometimes I still feel like I must perform before God will love me. I fear that God will stand me outside the castle and shoot me down in front of everyone, destroy me, punish me, take away my freedom, squelch my fun. Sometimes I ask myself why should the king of the universe, God Almighty who reigns in majesty supreme. Why should He love a sinful, broken down, sometimes discouraged, sometimes frustrated, sometimes rebellious, sometimes spiritually disabled man like me? Why should a crippled outcast like me gain favor in the eyes of the king? How is it possible? I know I can't perform well enough to pull it off? How can we gain total acceptance and favor from the King?

Turn with me in your Bibles to II Samuel chapter 9. Here we have an incredible story of kindness, of loyal love..yes a story of grace. We see grace illustrated by King David to someone totally undeserving of his kindness. The grace we read about in this story is from a human king to his subject, but it can illustrate for us the incredible grace that the king of the Universe has for you and I.

In II Samuel 9 we read of David's spiritually high point in his life. These are good times for King David. Verse 1 in chapter 7 tells us The Lord has given him rest on every side from all his enemies. With the borders are secure David begins to think more like a king than a warrior. He desires to build God a permanent temple, and the Lord says you get things prepared for your son to build. Yet the Lord gives David great promises of a kingdom, land and throne that will endure forever. In chapter 9 David's mind goes back to a promise that he made to his friend Jonathan. It had been about 15 years since that terrible battle on Mt. Gilboa where both King Saul and his son Jonathan were killed by the

Philistines. Over a decade before their death, I Samuel 20 David had promised Jonathan that He would never cut off loving kindness, the hesed loyal love from his family. He had made a similar promise to King Saul at the mouth of the cave. Thinking back on his promises David wonders if there is anyone left from Saul and Jonathan's family that he could show kindness to.

We pick up the story in verse 1 of II Samuel 9. (Read 1-4a) Why should a cripple outcast gain any favor from the king? It's purely by grace. Totally undeserved grace. There are some things we can learn about grace this morning from David's example to Mephibosheth. More than learn, we need to live in the same grace that God gives so generously to us. We may mouth the words "Amazing Grace" but until we live like it..then we just haven't quite got it yet. We may find it easy to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of carpet, roofing, heating, lighting, and parking spaces, but we have a difficult time grasping the significance of the grace of God. We are not even sure we practically need such a thing in our lives. Most of us need to learn more, go deeper with God in the area of grace. It will totally free us from the need for performance based love and acceptance.

We need to really know grace. Now the grace I'm talking about is not a woman, I'm not talking about the prayer that is said before meals, not the fluid movement made by an Olympic ice skater, it is not the poise of a model. Grace is unmerited favor. Special favor given to one who doesn't deserve it, cannot possibly earn it and will never be able to repay the kind favor. Grace is positive and unconditional acceptance in spite of the other person. Doesn't that sound attractive and so full of life and freedom?

There are some things we need to learn and live about grace. The first thing we need to learn is that grace comes with "No strings attached" Look with me at verse one. King David asks. Is there anyone? Then later in verse 3. Is there anyone? David wants to know if there is anyone left in the family of Saul to whom he can show kindness. That word kindness is the Hebrew word Hesed. It is most often used to describe God's loving kindness, the loyal love, the steadiness of committed love not based on the performance of the individual, not based on the abilities of the receivers of that heed love, but based on the one who delivers, the one

who reaches out and acts in love. Love without regard to circumstances. Love without any regard to attraction or hormones. Love without regard to emotion or consequences. A word used to describe grace. Favor given without any merit on the part of the receiver. David asks is there anyone. Anyone? Anyone to whom I can honor.

Notice that David did not ask Is there anyone left who would be qualified to receive my kindness. Grace comes with no strings attached. In verse 4 when the Saul's former servant Ziba mentioned Jonathan's son was still alive...but he is crippled in both feet. Notice David did not reply, well...how bad is it. Ziba gives David the heads up that this may not be his first choice for hanging out in his palace. But David doesn't ask how bad..he doesn't care. He immediately asked where is he? He doesn't care how bad a shape this guy is in. He does not even consider that in his culture a man people would view a man with a disability to be an embarrassment in the palace of the king. Grace comes with no strings attached.

Second thing we learn about grace in that We can't do enough to earn grace. Why? Because grace is given out not earned. It is based on the merits of another....not my own. #2 Grace must be absolutely free not earned. The difference between Christianity and all the other religions in the world is grace. All others have some form of works based acceptance. You must do your best to follow this list of does and don't in order to gain favor and salvation with the higher power. You must exercise discipline and self-control. Salvation is dependent on our ability to conform to the list, then the work of the one who saves. Christianity is totally based on grace. No matter how much we practice, there is nothing we can do to earn a spot in the heavenly baseball team.

David had a chance to either display his power or demonstrate his grace. When a new king, or dynasty came into power it was very common practice to wipe out any competition. The new king would kill all family members and relatives of the prior king, wipe out their dynasty. It was expected that David would do as the other kings around them did. It was politically a prudent move to eliminate any who might have a claim on the throne..but David chose to demonstrate not his power, but his grace.

He asks is there anyone left of the family of King Saul, the man who tried to gore me with his spear on several occasions, the man who

placed a bounty on my head and chased me from one hole to the next in the wilderness to kill me. Anyone left from his family so that I could honor them? Grace is not earned or deserved. It's given out absolutely free. Grace is terribly one-sided. Grace is dependent not on the receiver but on the giver. Grace is a special favor to one who doesn't deserve it, cannot possibly repay it and will never be able to earn it. There are no qualifiers on David's kindness. He does not expect to receive anything back. Grace comes to us not based on our own merit but the merit of others. Verse 1 David extends kindness to this cripple man, Mephibosheth, not because Mephibosheth is a great guy, but because of Jonathan's sake. His commitment to Jonathan to take care of his family I Samuel 20:15, and always demonstrate the loyal love to his family. David kept his promise to love no matter the circumstance, no matter the consequences. He had chosen to love no matter the shape the receiver of the love was in.

Point #1 Grace comes with no strings attached. Point #2 There is nothing you can do to earn grace. Point #3 Grace takes the initiative..Grace reaches out to our fears, emptiness and obscurity. It might be helpful to give some background of Mephibosheth. In II Samuel 4:4 we read of how he became crippled. Upon hearing the news that both Saul and Jonathan had been killed in battle. The royal household went into a panic. They knew all the family would be in danger, either from the Philistine victors or the guerrilla band of David warriors. Jonathan's son was next in line to the throne. Fear and panic caused the au-pair nurse to hurriedly mishandle the five year old boy Mephibosheth and race down the palace stairs. In her hurry to escape, the little boy fell and broke both ankles crippling him for life as bones failed to heal together properly. They escaped across the Jordan to an out of the way very obscure place called Lo-Debar. Meaning No pastureland. It was a desolate, lonely, and barren place far from the palace.

For the next 15 years or so this is where Mephibotsheth grew up. He may have heard many stories from the nurse and servants of how David was responsible for taking the kingdom away from him. How he was the rightful heir to the throne. How the panic and death caused his life-long disability. I'm sure as he looked at his feet and remembered the stories, it would be easy for him to grow angry and resentful toward

David. In fact his name, Mephibosheth means "seething dishonor". It would be easy for him to look at his terrible future hiding in an empty, barren out of the way obscure little town like Lo-debar, fanned to a flame by the stories..and take on a victim mentality. It would be easy for him to focus on what he thought should have happen to him. What he thought he deserved. Focused on resentment. David did this to me. Why God. Why did you let this happen to me? Why did you permit me to live with such a mess? Why did He allow this to happen to me? If he is really God.why doesn't He do something about it? We as people tend to quickly run to resentment and fear. That's only natural. Only grace could meet such a situation. It is grace that takes the initiative. Grace reaches out to our obscurity and emptiness. Grace reaches down to our fears in the midst of our brokenness.

Mephibosheth had nothing and deserved nothing. And grace reached down and took the initiative. (Read verses 6-8.) Can you picture Mephibosheth sitting at the table in Lo-bebar. Knock, Knock, Knock. A servant looks out the window. Oh no...it's a messenger from the king. Adrenaline. Fear. Crippled Mephibosheth has no choice, he cannot escape. After all these years of hiding, he's been discovered by the king. He knows he is a dead man. After a royal escort to the palace, he approaches the throne room shaking with fear, and falls on his face before David. The king says only one thing. His name. Mephibosheth. He doesn't say, grovel in the dirt you son of Saul. No. David doesn't bring up family connections, he speaks his personal name. Mephibosheth. Do not fear. Grace reaches out to us in our barrenness, emptiness, dissatisfaction emptiness and loneliness. Grace reaches down to our fears, in the midst of our brokenness and offers total acceptance.

Some of you find yourself today in a place like Lo-debar, a place of emptiness, dissatisfaction, loneliness. Maybe some have spent years hiding from the king, God Almighty. You feel it would be much safer if you avoided His notice. You have heard horror stories and want nothing to do with God. You have been caught up in the ways of another kingdom power, Climbing financial success ladder, drugs, addiction to alcohol, addicted to yourself, pleasure, stuff, recreation, addiction to relationships living a very futile life. Its one thing to the next and it never seems to end or satisfy. You are hiding from God in obscurity...then

knock, knock. Jesus says, behold I knock on the door if man hear my voice and opens it I will come in. We were all once there. We were all once like Adam and Eve, hiding from God, cowering in our fear and sin. Our fears of God were based on deceptions of reality. And in our fear...God found us. Amen! God says I want to grace you with my loyal love, my kindness. I want you to be a son and daughter to me. I want you to be part of my family. I will take all of you with your crutches and baggage and liabilities and addictions and struggles. The servant Ziba said there was someone left..but he was cripple. Implies that maybe he wasn't fit for the kingdom. He wanted David to know that he wouldn't get anything back from the relationship, little return for the investment of his kindness. David says, I don't care how messed up he is, I want him in my home. Grace offers acceptance that we could never deserve based on our performance. Mephibosheth was lame and had difficulty standing before the king...the king reaches down to us...lifts us up and says our name, personally. I want to honor you.

Grace comes with no strings attached, You cannot do enough to earn grace..it's based on anothers merit and not your own. Grace takes the initiative reaching out to us in our obscurity, emptiness our fears and brokenness. The king wants us to be a part of his family. Point #4 Grace favor us with what we do not deserve. Not only does grace offer us acceptance, Grace offers us abundance. Lets read the rest of the Chapter verses 9-13. David restore all of his grandfathers land and invites him the honor of eating regularly at the kings table. In fact 4 times it mentions that David wants to honor Mephibosheth by inviting him to eat at the kings table. He treats Mephibosheth verse 11 as one of the king's own sons. David would later write the words. In your presence O God is fullness of joy at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore. Wow! what kindness to eat with the immediate family and high ranking officials of all Israel. Obscurity to honor.

Picture what it was like to eat with those in the royal dinning room. Joab the muscular hungry military leader would be first to sit down. Then possibly the clever and witty Amnon. Then in would stride Absolom, what an incredibly handsome man, long wavy hair..the heartthrob of all Israelite maidens. Beautiful and tender Tamar would sit next to Absolom and be the model ready for the next front page cover on

people magazine. Later on, Solomon too would be joining these dinner guests. But always last, as they were waiting for the prayer. One could hear echoing through the massive palace halls. Clump, clump....dragggg. Clump, Clump draggg. Here would come Mephibosheth smiling to greet the others. He was a reminder of God's grace to all in the palace. Everyone who saw him struggle with his disability knew that the only reason he was in that position was because of the grace of the king.

God's grace is always available in the midst of our disabilities, mess ups and sin. The Almighty king of the universe wants to take us from our barrenness to honor at his table. He wants to bring us out of hiding to be found and favored with His kindness. For us that grace, found at the foot of the cross, is where real satisfaction and purpose in life begin. God reaches down and finds us, brings us to his table and covers our sin disabilities with the table cloth of his grace. As we limp through life with our mess-ups and sin, our crutches and struggles remind us of His grace. Our sin problem is a constant reminder of his grace...His amazing grace.

Now this would be a great happily ever after story. But the Bible mentions our friend Mephibosheth and the servant Ziba again, later in David's life. Flip over to chapter 19. Many years had past. David's poor parental choices had done their damage in his family. We are jumping ahead in the story of David but it fits well here. David's son Absalom has rebelled against his father and led a successful military coup, forcing David to flee from the palace. On the retreat David is met by the servant Ziba with some new horses and food for David and the royal guard. David asks where Mephibosheth is and Ziba replies that Mephibosheth was hoping to take advantage of the confusion of anarchy and restore the throne to himself. Ziba calls his master a traitor to David accusing him of betrayal. The royal forces eventually subdue the Absalom factions after Absalom is killed. On the triumphal entry back into the city,

David is met by Mephibosheth in chapter 19. Verse 24. He is in terrible shape, hadn't shaved or taken a bath since David left, he hadn't changed the bandages on his feet nor done any laundry. Why didn't you leave Jerusalem with me asks David. It seems David wanted to hear both sides of the story. Verse 26. Meph. says I was all ready to go but, Ziba deceived me and stranded me without a mount so I could not follow for I

am lame. He has slandered my name to you. Mephibosheth's appearance lent proof that he was not preening himself to be crowned king of Israel. Both men's stories could not have been true. One was lying. David could have called in witnesses who observed the night of the leaving. But David didn't care at this point. He could handle the lies, the deception. He was ready to forgive. Forgive both Ziba and Mephibosheth. In fact the paragraph before he forgave Shimei the guy who on David's way out of Jerusalem, cussed him out and through dirt clods at him. Grace is always ready to forgive. Point number 4, Grace always welcomes you back home. Grace can handle the mess up and failures, lies and hypocrisy. I tend to be a less forgiving person when I'm stressed out and tired. I need to hear this story of David in the middle of a fractured government, fighting a rebellious child, wiped out and fatigued from being on the run. David offers forgiveness. David persistently is determined to love this guy..no matter what. Grace always welcomes you back home. What an amazing grace.

Mary Ann Bird grew up knowing she was different, and hated it. She was born with a cleft palate, and when she started school, her classmates made it clear to me how awful she looked to others: a little girl with a misshapen lip, crooked nose, lopsided teeth, and garbled speech. I was convinced that no one outside my family could love me.

There was, however, a teacher in the second grade whom we all adored--Mrs. Leonard by name. She was short, round, happy--a sparkling lady. Every year Mrs. Leonard gave a hearing test to everyone in the class, and finally it was Mary's turn. She knew from past years that as we stood against the door and covered one ear, the teacher sitting at her desk would whisper something, and we would have to repeat it back--things like "The sky is blue" or "Do you have new shoes?" She writes, "I waited there for those words that God must have put into her mouth, those seven words that changed my life." Mrs. Leonard said, in her whisper, "I wish you were my little girl." God says to every person deformed by sin, "I wish you were my son" or "I wish you were my daughter."

He delights to replace our emptiness with fullness; our dissatisfaction with delight; our barrenness with fruitfulness; our fallenness with favor; our rebellion with righteous rejoicing; our suffering

with satisfaction; our disability with His total ability. God's grace wants to meet us right where we are lame, stumbling, hiding and fearful. We are all once enemies of God. yet He reconciled, renewed our relationship to God by the death of His son. But you must accept His grace. All it takes is your acceptance. He cannot give you what you refuse to receive. If you are not born of God you will be living in misery, defeat, frustration and dissatisfaction, far off from God. He wants to find us where we've been hiding and take us into His arms and bring us home. He wants to love us even when we couldn't possibly repay, even though none of us deserve His love..He wants to rain down upon us his special favor and grace. He wants us to experience the real satisfaction that can be found at the foot of the cross. He wants to find us trying to hide in our sinful and self pleasing rebellious condition and welcome us to enjoy a meal with Him. In love allowing the table cloth His grace to cover our sin. His grace truly is amazing. Why should a crippled outcast rebel expect to gain favor from the king? ..because the Almighty king offers grace, special favor, to all those who are identified with His son, we cannot perform. Jesus has paid it all.