

## I. Introduction

- A. If we're ever going to make it through life, with our faith in God intact, we're going to have make room in our theology for tough times in this life.
- B. We've all heard heroic stories in the Bible, where David whipped Goliath, and the walls of Jericho came tumbling down.
- C. But what about the other stories?
- D. Hebrews 11 runs through some of the great heroes of faith: Faith's Hall of Fame. There are two lists with two wildly different outcomes on faith. Let's read it and I'll explain:
  - 1. *29 By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned. 30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days. 31 By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace. 32 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: 33 who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. 35 Women received their dead raised to life again... (Hebrews 11:29-35a, NKJV).*
- E. Just a small sampling of stories in the Bible where everything turned out okay—people got messed up, but they showed faith, so God delivered them, and sent the bad guys packing. Good outcomes. They all lived happily ever after.
- F. But you might not know there's another paragraph with another list of faith's heroes. In this second list, there was no happily ever after—in this world, at least. God-fearing people exercised true and genuine faith, and everything turned out wrong.
  - 1. *35 Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. 36 Still others had trial of mocking and scourging, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned; they were sawn in two, were tempted, and were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented 38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. 39 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise (Hebrews 11:35-39, NKJV).*
- G. What does this mean? Group A: happily ever after. Group B: calamity, disaster, pain, poverty and death.
- H. What made the difference?
- I. Was one group winners, and one group losers? Group A victorious, but Group B defeated?
- J. Or maybe Group A had faith, but Group B let their faith get polluted with doubt. Was that it?
- K. No, nothing like that at all.
- L. Both groups are praised for their faith.
- M. Both groups are heroes, even though they had radically different outcomes.
  - 1. In Group A, the outcomes felt good—something people wanted to happen.
  - 2. IN Group B, the outcomes felt horrible—the people never wanted those things to happen.
- N. But in each Group there was one great force in the cosmos at work, and I want to talk about that force today, and explain it. It's one of those deep laws of the spiritual realm, like the law of gravity in the physical realm.
- O. The force is called SOVEREIGN GRACE.
- P. I want to use a case study in the Bible as a screw driver, to turn this truth deep inside your soul.
- Q. There is a force in the cosmos, flowing from the heart of God, all the time. And I want to name it and talk about it.

## II. Review

- A. Let me back up a little, and get you all caught up. We're talking about Underdogs. The truth in the Bible that God has a tender spot in His heart for underdogs: for you when you feel overwhelmed and all messed up.
- B. Last time, I showed you 1 John 5:4:
  - 1. *And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. (1 John 5:4, NKJV).*
- C. It's saying that when you face hard times, faith is the victory. When you face a bad job market, a bad financial market, or a bad singles meet-and-mingle market—faith is the victory. When the doctor has bad news, when your marriage is bad news, or when your kids become bad news, faith is the victory.
- D. What that means is this: your job is faith, God's job is outcomes.
- E. And what that also means is this: in the spiritual realm, victory is not the victory. Faith is the victory. The outcome is secondary. Whether or not you got the thing you prayed for is secondary.
- F. What matters most—what is truly primary in the eyes of God—is that you kept faith with Him.
- G. Group A with the good outcomes, or Group B with the painful outcomes—that's God's business. That's God's right to choose, and to orchestrate the affairs of your world to bring about His good ends.
- H. Yes, we all want to be in Group A, but until we can joyfully accept Group B, we'll never have the kind of maturity and unquenchable joy that citizens of a heavenly kingdom are supposed to have.

1. *34 You suffered along with those who were thrown into jail. When all you owned was taken from you, you accepted it with joy. You knew you had better things waiting for you in eternity (Hebrews 10:34, NLT).*

- I. Sovereign grace: God has the right to choose exactly what His unfailing grace will look like in situation.
- J. Contrary to health and wealth preaching, contrary to prosperity preaching, contrary to name it and claim it preaching, faith is not a con job, where you box God in by working up a false confidence based on your own desires.
- K. Faith is a restful repose, a considered confidence, in the heart of a God who does all things well—a God who answers every prayer better than you can imagine, a God who considers time important, but eternity more important, and therefore always has His eye on the bigger picture.
- L. Faith is the victory because faith flaxes into the sovereign grace of God.
- M. Let's see this in action:

### III. Mephibosheth

- A. *4 Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son who was lame 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 it happened, as she made haste to flee, that he fell and became lame. His name was Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 4:4, NKJV).*
  1. This is the first we hear of this man—Jonathan's son. Five years old, and crippled through an accident. His nurse was trying to protect him. In her haste she handed him a lifetime handicap.
  2. This is called TRAGEDY.
  3. Why do bad things happen? We live in a fallen world. When Adam and Eve chose sin, they chose all that comes with sin—pain, evil, disease, famine, hardship, suffering, illness, and death.
  4. There is no deeper reason why Mephibosheth was handicapped than this. There was no spiritual lesson at work.
  5. Suffering happens because mankind is far from God.
    - a) This is the best life can be at this distance from heaven.
  6. Mephibosheth was physically handicapped in his feet.
  7. What is your handicap?
    - a) It could be emotional—from a distant father, or absent parents, or abuse or trauma. Or maybe an addiction you can't shake, or a depression or griefs that won't let you go.
    - b) It could be physical—a disability in your body that keeps you from doing what you long to do.
    - c) It could be mental—your mind doesn't work like it once was, or your child's cognitive abilities aren't where you dreamed they would be. Or you or someone you love struggles with a mental illness or handicap or dysfunction.
    - d) It could be financial—you're out of money, out of a house, out of a business, and soon to be out of a home.
    - e) It could be anything—everybody has a set of trials, a set of handicaps. What's yours? What is your handicap?
      - (1) Does God have anything to say to you in your handicap?
  8. Mephibosheth was lame on both his feet. He couldn't walk without help and he lived in an age before wheelchairs. He was completely dependent on others for survival.
  9. Now fast forward many years to:
- B. *Now David said, "Is there still anyone who is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" (2 Samuel 9:1, NKJV).*
  1. David is the king. There has been great political upheaval, but David has survived. He is established on his throne.
  2. And one of the first things he does is entirely unexpected. He sits in his throne room, and asks if there is anyone left of the house of Saul.
  3. Saul was his nemesis, his old enemy, the previous king who was crazy and wanted to kill him.
  4. David wants a descendent of Saul to show him kindness.
  5. Why?
  6. For Jonathan's sake, King David loved Jonathan. They were best friends, even though Saul was Jonathan's dad.
  7. Get the set up because this isn't by accident.
  8. The king wants to bless unworthy person A for the sake of worthy person B. Does that ring any bells?
  9. It gets better, because you'll never guess what's behind this word kindness. It is the Hebrew word HESED, and Hesed means grace.
  10. So here we go. The sovereign king wishes to show grace to an unworthy person because of the merits and goodness of a worthy person who died.
  11. So David is looking for a son of Jonathan to show him grace.
  12. But it gets even better.

- c. *2 And there was a servant of the house of Saul whose name was Ziba. So when they had called him to David, the king said to him, "Are you Ziba?" And he said, "At your service!" 3 Then the king said, "Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, to whom I may show the kindness of God?" And Ziba said to the king, "There is still a son of Jonathan who is lame in his feet" (2 Samuel 9:2, 3, NKJV).*
1. Here, David kicks it up a notch, and this is not by accident. He wants to show the kindness of God, says verse 3.
  2. What we have here is a clinic on the grace of God, right here in the middle of the Old Testament. Remember the whole Bible is the book of the grace of God, both testaments are equally important to the people of God today.
  3. Ziba has one thing to say about this son of Jonathan, at the end of verse 3. What's that?
  4. He is lame in his feet.
  5. That's how he identified him. He didn't even say his name yet.
  6. And people will do that, won't they. They will label you; indentify you by how you're different—too tall, too short, too skinny, too fat, too dark, too light, too smart, too dumb, too pretty, too ugly.
  7. It's so painful and we have to learn to not do that. Let every label that comes out of your mouth be a good one; a life giving one.
  8. Ziba does that and then he adds some detail.
- d. *4 So the king said to him, "Where is he?" And Ziba said to the king, "Indeed he is in the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, in Lo Debar." 5 Then King David sent and brought him out of the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, from Lo Debar. 6 Now when Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, had come to David, he fell on his face and prostrated himself. Then David said, "Mephibosheth?" And he answered, "Here is your servant!" 7 So David said to him, "Do not fear, for I will surely show you kindness for Jonathan your father's sake, and will restore to you all the land of Saul your grandfather; and you shall eat bread at my table continually." 8 Then he bowed himself, and said, "What is your servant, that you should look upon such a dead dog as I?" (2 Samuel 9:4-8, NKJV).*
- e. What does sovereign grace look like in this story?
1. Sovereign Grace takes the initiative. Do you know that God is searching for you even when you're not searching for Him? He wanted you first. He loved you first. He sent His son to die for you before you had ever given Him the slightest thought. And the fact that you are here today, in a church, singing praise to God, and listening to God in His word—the fact that you're here today is because God sought you out, and you almost couldn't help yourself. Sovereign grace takes the initiative.
  2. Sovereign Grace calls us out of Lo Debar. What is Lo Debar? That's where Mephibosheth, the grandson of a king, lived. It means NO PASTURE. No sustenance. No happiness. No hopefulness. And before a person has Jesus, that's where you live. You might have money, but it doesn't satisfy. You might have friends and sex and toys and cold beer to wash it down, but there's still emptiness inside. Jesus came because life without God doesn't work. He died because we couldn't connect to God without it. Jesus came seeking you in the land of No Hope even before you ever turned a thought toward God.
  3. Sovereign Grace gives us an inheritance we didn't earn and don't deserve. David restored all the land that belonged to King Saul to Mephibosheth. And even better, he gave Mephiboseth a seat at the king's table for the rest of his life. A royal feast every night for as long as he lived. Definitely a Group A kind of outcome, don't you think? A kind of happily ever after.
    - a) But what if we don't get a seat at the king's table? What if we stay in Lo Debar? Does that mean we messed up, or maybe God messed up?
    - b) Let me answer that question with another question:
      - (1) What if this world will always be Lo Debar, even at its best?
      - (2) Even though Mephibosheth sat at the king's table, and enjoyed the king's inheritance, he still couldn't walk, he still couldn't run, he still couldn't move around without somebody's help.
    - c) The truth is that we are all handicapped, mind will, and emotions, body, soul, and spirit, until we stand face to face with our Savior, and He makes everything right.
    - d) Until that day happens, we do not give up hope, and we don't give in to depression and fear—because even if we can't eat heaven's lasagna today, we can smell it cooking, and pull our hearts up to the table, and get ready to dig in.
  4. Sovereign grace repairs our broken identity. It tells us who we aren't, and honors us according to who we really are.
    - a) Mephibosheth called himself dead; sovereign grace called him alive.
    - b) Mephibosheth called himself a dog; sovereign grace called him a prince with God.
    - c) Mephibosheth called himself poor; sovereign grace called him rich.
    - d) Mephibosheth called himself lame; sovereign grace called him able to do all things.

- e) God loves underdogs.
  - (1) The basic problem of life is that we don't see ourselves as God sees us. We believe the lies from the devil instead of the truth of God.
  - (2) God restores everything the fall took away.
- 5. Sovereign grace accomplishes God's purposes in God's ways even when we don't see it happening.
  - a) Here's the crazy part of the story: if Mephibosheth had not been crippled as a child, the odds are strong he would have died with Saul and Jonathan—and never lived to eat at the king's table.
  - b) The victory isn't the victory; faith is the victory.
  - c) I've said before, it's like a bow and arrow. We're the bow, and God has something in our lives as the arrow. He pulls us back, and stretches us out. And we say, that's enough, Lord. He pulls some more, and we panic. We can't take any more and we say that's enough Lord. He pulls some more, and we don't think we can endure it and we say that's enough Lord.
  - d) We say that's enough Lord because we don't know what He's aiming at.
  - e) And we don't know what He's aiming at, because even if He told us, we wouldn't get it.
- F. *13 So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem, for he ate continually at the king's table. And he was lame in both his feet (2 Samuel 9:13, NKJV).*
  - 1. So there is a happy camper, Mephibosheth, ordering around his new servants, eating at the king's table, enjoying a happily ever after nobody would have ever predicted.
  - 2. The lameness never went away, but I wonder if it had to?
  - 3. It's grace because it's good and you don't earn it or make it happen.
  - 4. And it's sovereign because you can't control it. You're not over it, you're under it, and God is God, and you're not.

#### IV. Conclusion

- A. We started in Hebrews 11, and I want to finish there.
- B. Because this is really how God feels about underdogs:
  - 1. *37 They were stoned; they were sawn in two, were tempted, and were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented 38 of whom the world was not worthy (Hebrews 11:37, 38, NKJV).*
- C. Of whom the world was not worthy.
- D. Nobody on earth may respect you. Nobody on earth may know your name. Nobody may stand up and salute when they see you coming.
- E. So what?
- F. If you are a man of faith, or a woman of faith, the world is not worthy of you. I don't care if you are smallest, weakest, most confused and broken, guiltiest, most messed up, most damaged man or woman of faith, you have more value in the eyes of God than all the wealth of earth combined.
- G. I don't care if your faith is no bigger than a poppy seed on a hot dog bun.
- H. I don't care if your faith is shaky, and your doubts overwhelm.
- I. And I don't care if you limp or run or walk or fly.
- J. If you are a person of faith, the world is not worthy of you.
- K. Should that make you arrogant? No.
- L. Should it make you confident? Yes.
- M. And one last thing—the story of Mephibosheth happened 3,000 years ago.
- N. Guess who hasn't been lame in both is feet for the last 3,000 years.
- O. Sovereign grace—sooner or later, it's all happily ever after.