Hi,

I saw that *Sports Illustrated* gave the Cowboys an A+ in the draft. Let’s hope we get to see these rookies play this fall!

Here are today’s updates:

* **My Tuesday class (Genesis) will be at 11:45 today** [on my Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/scottengle), as we wrap up chapter four and head into the genealogies of chapter five. [If you don’t have a Facebook account you will have to view the class on my YouTube channel.](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChtwqaUcpZbwyTWnkp6INwQ?view_as=subscriber) I will make sure all recordings are up and ready for viewing by the end of the day. (YouTube willing!).
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org/).
* Keep sending in those movie and book recommendations.

I nearly missed one of my favorite Old Testament stories of friendship, one that extended past the grave.

***2 Samuel 9:1-13 (New Living Translation)***

**One day David began wondering if anyone in Saul’s family was still alive, for he had promised Jonathan that he would show kindness to them. He summoned a man named Ziba, who had been one of Saul’s servants. “Are you Ziba?” the king asked.**

**“Yes sir, I am,” Ziba replied.**

**The king then asked him, “Is anyone still alive from Saul’s family? If so, I want to show God’s kindness to them in any way I can.”**

**Ziba replied, “Yes, one of Jonathan’s sons is still alive, but he is crippled.”**

**“Where is he?” the king asked.**

**“In Lo-debar,” Ziba told him, “at the home of Makir son of Ammiel.” So David sent for him and brought him from Makir’s home. His name was Mephibosheth; he was Jonathan’s son and Saul’s grandson. When he came to David, he bowed low in great fear and said, “I am your servant.”**

**But David said, “Don’t be afraid! I’ve asked you to come so that I can be kind to you because of my vow to your father, Jonathan. I will give you all the land that once belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you may live here with me at the palace!”**

**Mephibosheth fell to the ground before the king. “Should the king show such kindness to a dead dog like me?” he exclaimed.**

**Then the king summoned Saul’s servant Ziba and said, “I have given your master’s grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family. You and your sons and servants are to farm the land for him to produce food for his family. But Mephibosheth will live here at the palace with me.”**

**Ziba, who had fifteen sons and twenty servants, replied, “Yes, my lord; I will do all that you have commanded.” And from that time on, Mephibosheth ate regularly with David, as though he were one of his own sons. Mephibosheth had a young son named Mica. And from then on, all the members of Ziba’s household were Mephibosheth’s servants. And Mephibosheth, who was crippled in both feet, moved to Jerusalem to live at the palace.**

While I was in college, I worked in Wyoming a couple of summers collecting samples of underground water for use in uranium exploration. One Sunday, while I was visiting the home office in Denver, I attended Sunday morning services at a large Episcopal Cathedral. I vividly remember the inner-city boys choir that sang a haunting version of “Let us Break Bread Together.” When they finished, there weren’t many dry eyes as we all came forward to receive Holy Communion. It was the “together” that got to me, that all of us were called by God to the table, his table. I was only eighteen at the time, so what did I really know about the world. But, looking back, that morning was the beginning of a long and meandering education at Jesus’ feet.

I know of no story of in all of Scripture that better illustrates “coming to the table” better than that of the mighty King David and a frightened, crippled young man named Mephibosheth.

*A bit of background*

About a thousand years before Jesus, God’s prophet Samuel anointed Saul as the first king of the united tribes of Israel, who quickly proved to be a disappointment. He was disobedient to God and given to making rash decisions. Once, Saul was even ready to kill his own son, Jonathan, for breaking one of Saul’s battle orders. Only the intervention of the soldiers saved Jonathan’s life. After Saul disobeyed God a second time, we are told that “The Lord was sorry that he had made Saul king over Israel” (1 Samuel 15:35). God told his prophet Samuel to anoint a young shepherd named David as the next king of Israel. Not knowing that God had chosen David to be his successor, Saul welcomed David into the royal court as a musician. But after David defeated the Philistine giant, Goliath, the mentally and spiritually deteriorating Saul began to suspect that David might be the one to whom God had given Saul’s kingdom. And Saul turned against David.

Jonathan, Saul’s son, first met David soon after David’s victory over Goliath and the Philistines. Like so many others during David’s long life, Jonathan must have been drawn to the charismatic young man. We are told that Jonathan’s soul was bound to David’s. Jonathan loved David as he loved himself. Jonathan made a covenant with David, even handing over his royal robe and sword. It is important for us to see that Jonathan offered all this to David without even a hint of reciprocity or reward. Jonathan’s covenantal friendship was a gift freely given. Indeed, this pretty much characterized their relationship. Twice more, Jonathan would make a covenant with David and only on the third occasion are we explicitly told that the covenant was made mutually. It is this mutual covenant that is the focus of Mephibosheth’s story.

*A crushing exile*

To be born the grandson of a king. Little Mephibosheth (don’t you wonder if he had a nickname) was surely the darling of the entire royal household and all the people of Israel. You can bet that he was adored and doted upon. Yet, the boy’s life quickly took a tragic turn. At the age of five, his grandfather, Saul, and father, Jonathan, were killed in battle against Israel’s arch enemies, the Philistines. Fearing that the Philistines would march upon the palace, the royal household fled in panic. One of the nurses grabbed Mephibosheth but accidentally dropped the boy, permanently crippling him in both legs (2 Samuel 4:4). Though they made it away safely, things went from bad to worse, at least from the perspective of Saul’s family. David, whom Saul had tried to hunt down and kill, was made king over the tribe of Judah and eight years later was made king over all the tribes of Israel. He would have the power of life and death. Saul’s family was right to expect that they were as good as dead, for that was the way the ancient world worked in the royal palaces: death to all potential rivals.

*At the king’s table*

Jonathan’s friendship with David had often been pretty one-sided. Twice, Jonathan had pledged himself to David without reciprocation. The pledges were Jonathan’s freely-given gifts. But on the third occasion, both men had made a covenant, the pledges had been mutual.

After David defeated Israel’s enemies and conquered Jerusalem, he sought a way to keep his covenant with Jonathan and to show respect to Saul. So, David asks Ziba, a long-time servant in Saul’s household whether any of Saul’s family still lived, so that David could extend mercy and kindness toward them. David might be a busy king, but there should always time for mercy.

Ziba reveals to David that Jonathan’s son has survived and is living in the home of Makir. By now, Mephibosheth is about twenty. Mephibosheth is old enough to know that to the king, at least to most kings, he is as good as a “dead dog”(2 Samuel 9:8). So, when he is summoned before the king, Mephibosheth perhaps expects that David plans on getting rid of all potential opposition, as was customary with many rulers then and now. David, however, ensures the continuation of Saul’s household by inviting Mephibosheth to eat at David’s table, giving all of Saul’s estate to him, and asking the young man to live in the palace. In so doing, David takes Mephibosheth in like a son.

*After the revolt*

In an ironic turn, it is not Saul’s household that poses a threat to David’s monarchy, but his own. David’s son, Absalom, turns on his father after David refuses to take action when another of David’s sons (Absalom’s half-brother, Amnon) rapes Absalom’s full sister, Tamar. Two years later, Absalom would kill Amnon himself and eventually lead an attempted coup d’état against his father. Indeed, David has to flee eastward from Jerusalem where he gathers together forces loyal to himself. As David flees the city, he runs into Ziba, Mephibosheth’s servant (2 Samuel 16:1-4). When David asks about Mephibosheth, Ziba tells him that his master has stayed in Jerusalem, expecting that with David’s departure he will get back Saul’s kingdom. Not surprisingly given this word of betrayal, David gives to Ziba all that belongs to Mephibosheth.

David’s army puts down the rebellion, though it is a hollow victory. Absalom is killed in battle after getting tangled in the branches of an oak tree. Later, David would weep for him, saying “Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!” (2 Samuel 18:33).

Upon returning to Jerusalem to reclaim his throne, David encounters Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 19:24-30), who is unkempt and generally filthy. When David asks him why he did not flee Jerusalem with those who were loyal to David, Mephibosheth says he tried but couldn’t because Ziba took off with the donkey, leaving the crippled man with no way to leave. Mephibosheth throws himself on David’s mercy, reminding him that he had invited Mephibosheth to eat at David’s table.

Evidently, Absalom’s rebellion and death have taken a huge toll on David. He doesn’t even try to sort out who is telling him the truth about Mephibosheth’s role in the rebellion, Ziba or Mephibosheth. Instead, David simply divides the estate in two, giving half to each of them.

The story of Mephibosheth at David’s table is a story about *covenant*. God made a covenant with his people and would be faithful to it, even if the people would not. David made a covenant with Jonathan and would be faithful to it even after Jonathan’s death. It is also a story of *return from exile*, one of the Israelites’ favorite stories. It is the story of the Jews’ exile in Babylon and their own hoped-for return from exile. It is the story told by Jesus about a father and a prodigal son. It is a story of grace and kindness, as Bruce Birch drives home:

Seen in the light of the hopeful meaning this episode may have held for exiles, a seemingly odd episode of David’s loyalty and kindness becomes a testimony to divine loyalty and kindness. We read as those who constantly find ourselves cut off from our full future—existing as remnants with little hope for fullness of life except for the *hesed* of God, a divine sovereign who restores us to wholeness and invites us to sit at table.

Medieval and Renaissance Christian artists sometimes pictured David and Mephibosheth in the paintings, stained-glass windows, and sculptures they produced. Often when they did, the food they depicted on the king’s table was the bread and the cup of the eucharistic meal. David’s kindness was understood as God’s kindness (v. 3), and the king’s table to which we are all invited is ultimately God’s table.

*Movie recommendation*

The movie *Risen* came up in my Sunday class. It came out a few years ago and stars Joseph Fiennes. It tells the story of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection through the eyes of a Roman Centurion.

*Book recommendation*

Today’s recommendation is a follow-up to yesterday’s book about origins, *Adam and the Genome*. John Walton is a highly regarded professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College, the educational bastion of evangelical Christianity. He is writing a series of “Lost World” books in which he takes a look at some of the really tough OT questions via a set of propositions. One is titled *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*. Walton is always worth reading; this book is challenging and helpful.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott