

This is a (very long!) sermon we found on Rizpah, by David Legge. Jenny has highlighted some interesting parts. You can listen to it if you would rather here: <https://www.preachtheword.com/sermon/women04.shtml>. It comes from an evangelical standpoint.

Now if you've been with us in this series looking at 'Little Women', learning lessons from lesser known women of the Bible, you will remember that we began in our first week with the character of Rahab. We felt, at least I did anyway, that there was a hint of espionage in that particular story. The following week we looked at Abigail, and of course all you ladies enjoyed the romance that was in that tale. Then the next study was the woman of Abel, and that was more like a horror story with all the blood and guts involved! If we were to classify tonight's story in some kind of literary genre, we would probably come to the conclusion that the story of Rizpah is a tragedy if ever there was one.

Who of us can understand, enter into what it must have been for her? Who can take in the depth of the pain of a grieving mother like this?

Now I have found in my research, looking at this character, that a lot of poetry has been written about this dear lady. Alfred Tennyson, Lord Alfred Tennyson, wrote a poem called 'Rizpah', and it wasn't specifically about this character, but many feel that behind the scenes of his thoughts he was thinking of this biblical lady. One of the lines in his poem goes like this: 'But the night has crept into my heart and began to darken my eyes'. That was Rizpah's experience, and tonight we're going to look deep into the dark, damp eyes of this mother as she keeps a vigil at Gibeah's hill where her son's corpses have been left to rot. Despite a law that said that their burial should take place before sunset, there they are, there she is.

I want you this evening to see her convulsing in anguish, perhaps pounding her chest having watched her two sons die in a gruesome manner, and now suffering the ignominy of the shameful exposure of their bodies to the merciless elements. There she is on her sackcloth rug, her skin is brown and seared from the exceeding heat, her once jet black hair is shot with grey and matted by nights of wind and rain one after

another. All day and all night, for five solid months the Bible says, from barley harvest - that's about late April time - to the early rains in the month of October, she sits like a sentinel on watch, lest a claw or a paw be laid upon the faces of her sons who once nestled to her breast. Can you see her as she flaps and squeals, driving away vultures and ravens? At night she is haunted in the dark by the glowing eyes of savage beasts, perhaps in desperation she has to reach for a flaming brand in the campfire to scare them away. At night, I wonder, was she afraid to close her eyes lest in sleep the scavengers that were circling overhead dive for their prey? Tennyson imagines her saying to any enquirers concerning her condition, these words:

'Ah - you, that have lived so soft, what should you know of the night,
The blast and the burning shame and the bitter frost and the fright?
I have done it', she says, 'while you were asleep - you were only made for the day.

I have gathered my baby together - and now you may go your way'.

It's a heartbreaking scene. As one writer has said: 'Rizpah would not bury her grief as long as the bodies of her sons remained unburied'. There we see her, a tragic figure. Who of us can understand, enter into what it must have been for her? Who can take in the depth of the pain of a grieving mother like this? Though I ask the question, I have to answer: the fact of the matter is, many understand. Many, in a relative sense, know what Rizpah went through, because there are those who have suffered the loss of a child - and if they have never suffered the loss of a child, they have experienced one tragedy or another in their lifetime, and if you're not one of those people the day will surely come when you will experience something that could be classified as a tragedy. Henry Kendall wrote another poem on Rizpah, and he put it like this, broadening this theme he says:

'We have our Rizpahs in these modern days
Who've lost their households through no sin of theirs,
On bloody fields and in the pits of war;

And though their dead were sheltered in the sod
By friendly hands, these have not suffered less
Than she of Judah did, nor is their love
Surpassed by hers'.

She was a woman of tragedy, perhaps you are too. Maybe you are of the male gender, and you know what tragedy is also - well, there's a lot we can learn from this little woman of seeming insignificance in biblical writ, this woman of tragedy. I want to give you the lesson tonight under four headings which are questions. The first is: how had things come to this? The second: how did she get through this? The third: could any good come out of this? The fourth: what can we learn from all this?

The first: how had things come to this? Now before looking at the matter in hand in 2 Samuel 21, it's important that you realise that this incident that we are concentrating on specifically was not the first time Rizpah had become an innocent victim in a bigger battle that was out of her hands. I wonder do you ever feel like that? Something is going on in your life, and you've no control over it, and as far as you're

concerned it's not your fault, and you class yourself a victim. Well Rizpah was in 2 Samuel 21, but if you turn with me now to 2 Samuel chapter 3, you will see the first time - as far as we have it recorded - that Rizpah suffered victimisation from the selfish hands of others. Second Samuel 3 verse 7, we'll just read that verse: 'And Saul had a concubine, whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah: and Ishbosheth said to Abner, Wherefore hast thou gone in unto my father's concubine?'

I've got to say something to you so that you understand what this verse means: if anyone was to have sexual relations with one of the king's women, whether it was the king's wife or the king's harem, that was understood in the custom of the days that we're speaking of as an attempt to take the throne. So by taking his bride or by taking one of his concubines, you were saying that you were in authority and you wanted, or were taking the kingdom. Now what's going on here in 2 Samuel 3 is that Saul has died, and Ishbosheth Saul's son has now accused Abner, Saul's General of the army, of relations with Rizpah. He suspects that Abner is losing in loyalty toward the house of Saul. Now, Abner denies vigorously that he laid a

hand on Rizpah, and it's actually this incident that causes Abner to transfer his allegiance to David and bring the eleven tribes over with him. Now we don't know from the Bible whether Abner was guilty of sleeping with Rizpah - but either way, it doesn't really matter whether he did or whether he didn't, I ask you a question tonight: who is the victim in this whole scenario? Rizpah. Whether she was raped is immaterial in a sense to the fact that she was slandered, any reputation she may have had in the court was now in tatters, and all at the expense of someone else's squabble.

Right away, before we even enter 2 Samuel 21, the biblical author paints a portrait for us of Rizpah as one who was used and abused by others, trodden upon as others climbed their status ladder! Many feel like that in life and, I have to say, particularly women. Now Rizpah suffers a second cruelty, for her two sons to King Saul are now hanging on a tree - Armoni is the name of one, and Mephibosheth the name of the other, and that is not Mephibosheth that was Jonathan's son - and they are both dead. To add insult to injury, the fact of the gruesome death is not enough, they are not granted a proper

burial - there they are left to hang in the open air, exposed to the elements. I ask you the question on Rizpah's behalf: did she deserve this? Had she done anything to warrant such treatment? Life's like that - I'm not saying there aren't things that happen to us we do deserve, and we ask for when we precipitate with our behaviour and choices and decisions - but this could not be classed as one in this woman's life. Again, she is suffering for the selfish sins of another. We see what those sins are, turn back with me to 2 Samuel 21 and verse 2 and we see that the cause of this bloodshed is because of the bloodthirsty house of Saul.

The biblical author paints a portrait for us of Rizpah as one who was used and abused by others, trodden upon as others climbed their status ladder!

Now let's tie all the loose ends together so that we understand the context of this character Rizpah. In verse 1 we read that there was a famine in the land. Now Deuteronomy 28 tells us that famine in Israel was often for divine chastisement. God was making the heaven brass and the ground fruitless to bring His people away from sin to repentance and faith in Himself.

So David and his kingdom are experiencing a famine, and so he goes to God and enquires what the reason is, and God tells him that Saul broke the covenant with the Gibeonites, that's why you're experiencing a famine. In verse 2 the author outlines that for us, and he summarises effectively what we read in Joshua 9 verses 3 to 27, and that is that about 400 years earlier than this moment the Gibeonites, who were Canaanites in the land before the Israelites inhabited it, they tricked Joshua into a treaty and a covenant to guarantee their protection and security in the promised land. If you read the story, they made out that they were foreigners coming to serve the Living God, when really they were their very close neighbours who God had told them to cleanse from the land. They duped Joshua, and he gave his word, and it was before God, and Joshua and the Israelites had to honour it - but now King Saul comes along, 400 years after this event, and he breaks the treaty and he tries to exterminate the Gibeonites from Israel. Verse 2 says that his motivation was zeal for the children of Israel.

Now, here are several lessons from the behaviour of Saul before we even look at the character of Rizpah. A first elementary lesson is that we need to note that Saul did this act through zeal. Now righteous zeal in the word of God is often the motivation for heroic faith, but we need to note tonight that misdirected zeal can have serious and long, far reaching consequences. Now I just suspect that perhaps Saul was trying to make up for the fact that he spared the king of the Amalekites, and he spared some of their livestock when God told him to exterminate them all. Maybe he thought: 'Well, when I'm dealing with these Gibeonites, I'll not make that mistake again!' - and he wiped them all out, or most of them anyway! His zeal may have expressed a sincere desire to do something he felt was right, but he did something that was wrong. So that means that you cannot always trust your zeal. Didn't Paul say that in Romans 10 when he was crying to God, as it were, for those who were his kinsmen according to the flesh in Israel, that they would be saved. In verse 2 of that same chapter he says: 'For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge'. You couldn't get anyone more zealous for God than a Jew, particularly the

Jew of Jews, the Pharisee. Paul says that of his own self in his biographical text in Philippians 3:6, he says: 'Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless'. Yet he was wrong, he was an enemy of God.

You can't trust your zeal all the time, but a second lesson is that the time that transpired from these events did not nullify the covenant with the Gibeonites that Joshua had made, nor did it erase Saul's sin against them. So what I'm saying is that 400 years had passed since Joshua made the covenant with the Gibeonites, several years have now passed since Saul had sinned against them, now David is suffering because of Saul's slaughter - but time didn't change anything. Here's a lesson for you tonight, and it's one that many of us learn with hardship: time and truth run together. Time and truth run together! What do I mean? Numbers 32:23, you can be absolutely sure that your sin will find you out, it will catch up on you, the truth will arrest you one day. In Galatians 6 verse 7 we have the law of sowing and reaping, Paul says there: 'God is not mocked: whatever a man sows he reaps'. In this

particular instance it was a matter of the word that was given by Joshua as a man of God to the Gibeonites, and God takes our word seriously - more serious than we do! God remembers what we say, and keeping our word is no small matter to God - to such an extent that 400 years later, plus more, He is visiting the sins of transgressing agreements on the ancestors of Joshua and Saul.

What the Gibeonites wanted was life for life, and so they requested seven offspring, males, seven sons of Saul to die...
So, because of this, in verse 3 David approaches the Gibeonites and he asks them what they would accept as an atonement, a satisfactory sacrifice for Saul's offence. In verse 4 you will see that there was no amount of silver or gold, no financial compensation that would satisfy these people. They also said: 'Nor shall you kill any man in Israel for us' - now that could be translated as them really saying, 'It's not for us to put a man to death in Israel'. In other words, they're expressing the fact that they have no rights in Israel, they have no authority for taking blood vengeance against the guilty man, they're really saying: 'David, if something is going to be done,

you're going to have to give us the jurisdiction to do it. It's going to have to be done in your name!'

What the Gibeonites wanted was life for life, and so they requested seven offspring, males, seven sons of Saul to die. Two of those sons were Armoni and Mephibosheth, Rizpah's sons, the other five were Saul's grandsons. David gave permission for them to be hanged after being executed, and there they hanged for the sins of the father - exposed, impaled to a pole in Gibeah. Incidentally, Gibeah in 1 Samuel 10:26 is designated as the capital city for Saul's reign. If you like, this is the epitome of the fact that Saul's sin was revisiting his house. As God said to Cain, 'Sin lieth at the door', and literally Saul's sin was coming to his own back door again.

Oh, I say to you from the Scriptures, as I say to myself: beware, personal sins can be revisited upon us, and indeed revisited upon our families - because often our sins have consequences. No man is an island, no man sins unto himself, but sins affect others. Now you might say: 'Well, it's not really fair, is it, that these two sons of Saul and five grandsons should suffer for their father and grandfather's

sins?'. Well, it's not really fair that you should suffer for somebody else's selfish sins, or Rizpah should suffer for other men's sins, but she did - that's a fact of life, it is part of the fall, we suffer because of what others do. But maybe your next question is, and it certainly should be: 'But if this was wrong, why did David go along with it? You wouldn't think he would allow something that was unjust'. Well you're probably right, indeed Deuteronomy 24 verse 16 prohibits punishment of a son for his father's sins. In this instance we never find David reprimanded by God for taking this action, and it may well be that David was just, and the Gibeonites were just - and when it says that this was a judgement for Saul's bloodthirsty house, it may be that Saul was not the only one involved with this, but perhaps these two sons of Rizpah and five grandsons of Saul were also party to this murder and extermination of the Gibeonites.

Indeed, you will note that Rizpah makes no attempt to cut down these bodies. Perhaps she shows her submission to the righteous judgement of God. But even if that be the case, the fact of the matter is: she is still there, she is still mourning, she

is still loving, she's still praying, she's still interceding, she's still mediating. What a lesson there is for us all, especially those who are parents. Like Rizpah's children, your children will surely do wrong - and though you should never condone any wrong that they do, never ever ever cut them off from your love. Sometimes I hear very harsh Christians saying: 'If he goes that far, or does that thing, that's it, I don't want to see him or her again' - that's a tragedy. However these two sons died, they were still her sons. When you walk down the street and see a man lying in the gutter, or drive through the centre of town late at night and see the working girls, we of all people as Christians ought to remember that that is some mother's son, some mother's daughter - a human being that used to be in the cradle that sin has destroyed. Whatever they had done, verse 10 tells us Rizpah remained near the bodies, protecting them from scavengers from the barley harvest in late April until the early rains in October.

Please do not think that Rizpah was a wee woman, weepy-eyed and weak-kneed. This was a woman whose devotion manifested itself in a steely eyed determination...

That's how things had come to this, but how did she get through this? Well, if I was to answer that I probably could do it in just one word, she got through it all by love. You see, love covers a multitude of sins. But if I was to be more specific, she got through this ordeal through a love that was expressed in devotion. Now please do not think that Rizpah was a wee woman, weepy-eyed and weak-kneed. This was a woman whose devotion manifested itself in a steely eyed determination. She is one of the most persevering, persistent characters in the whole of the word of God. Now here is a New Testament lesson for us, for we read in Romans chapter 5 verses 3-4 these words: 'And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope'. Remember that: here's a woman who had no rights, it would seem, she had little power in the court in the land, she had now been stripped of any family or social dignity she may have had - yet she made a resolution to sit there for five months until her sons were buried.

How did she get through it? Sheer love that was birthed in a devotion that was characterised by a determination that was second to none. She wasn't deterred by her hunger, by exhaustion, by the stench of the decomposing bodies, by her own grief, by hopelessness of her situation, by the reactions of others who passed by - but her tribulation worked patience, and her patience experience, and her experience hope. She never gave up! She loved, and because she loved she was devoted, and because she was devoted she persevered, and because she persevered it gave birth to hope in her heart. How do you get through? How do I get through? Hope. You see when you lose hope, you lose everything.

Could any good come out of this? We have seen how things came to this, how she got through this, it's very hard to see a light at the end of the tunnel of such an experience. One author has said: 'By refusing to hide her grief, by living it out in public, Rizpah gave meaning to her son's deaths, making the entire nation face the evil of what had happened'. That's exactly right: could any good come out of this? Verse 11, look at it: 'And it was told David what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah,

the concubine of Saul, had done'. David heard of her devotion, of her love, of her sacrifice, and it touched his heart. We read that he took steps to give a decent burial to these two men and the other five.

But in verse 12 we read something very interesting, for 'David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from the men of Jabeshgilead, which had stolen them from the street of Bethshan, where the Philistines had hanged them, when the Philistines had slain Saul in Gilboa', and we read that he buried them, verse 14, in the land that belonged to the Benjamites. Did any good come out of this awful situation? Yes. Not only did this wee woman, because of her hope, get her two sons buried, but she pricked the conscience of a King who remembered a similar situation where Saul and his son Jonathan, who David loved better than the love of women, were slain and hung, impaled to the wall of the city of Bethshan - and how the brave men of Jabeshgilead went, against all odds, and retrieved their dismembered bodies and buried them there. David realised that they had not been given a proper burial the way they should have been, and his

conscience was moved to do it - why? Because of this little woman! David's action is directly related to the determinate devotion of an insignificant concubine called Rizpah. Surely now this used and abused victim had come into her own?

It shows you, doesn't it, the power of one? Can I say to you ladies tonight: the power of one woman, one tragic woman and yet one highly compassionate, deeply loving, devoted woman who persevered, never lost hope, who turned the heart of a King - what a woman! Now, we fourthly need to ask: what can we learn from all this? We've seen how things had come to this, how she got through this, and the good that could come out of this - but what can we learn in our day and age, going through the struggles and tribulations that we face, from this situation? There are four things that I want to share with you this evening, lessons we can learn from Rizpah.

I've read a number of commentators who comment on Rizpah - and there are very few, I have to add - but they would accuse Rizpah of inordinate grief...

The first is a lesson on loss, a lesson on bereavement and sorrow. Now I've read a number of commentators who comment on Rizpah - and there are very few, I have to add - but they would accuse Rizpah of inordinate grief. To put it in our words, she was going a bit over the top. I don't know what you think of that, and I have to say that there is a danger that we can absorb ourselves in a hopeless grief over a long period of time, but those who accuse Rizpah of this, I feel personally, are trying to extract her out of the context in which she is experiencing this grief. You don't know, no commentator or Bible teacher knows, what she was going through. Incidentally, none of you know what anyone else is going through when they are grieving. That's why you should be slow to judge others concerning how they grieve, because many people, if not everyone, grieve differently. Don't be like some people who think that after a few weeks you should be just getting over it, and getting on with your life.

I love Matthew Henry, but I have to disagree with him on this point. This is what he says: 'Rizpah indulged her grief, as mourners are apt to do, to no good purpose. When sorrow, in

such cases, is in danger of excess, we should rather study how to divert and pacify it, rather than humour and gratify it. Why should we thus harden ourselves in sorrow?'. Now that is a danger, he's right - but where he is wrong is that it was not to no good purpose! Had Rizpah not kept this vigil of sorrow and grief, David would not have acted as he did, ultimately peace would not have been brought to his kingdom, and famine would not have departed from the land. Let's always remember that genuine grief, long-term grief, is not inordinate. Our Lord Jesus wept.

From Rizpah we get a lesson on loss, the obvious lesson we get is on love. First of all, love to others. I'm sure most of you know Shakespeare's 116th sonnet:

'Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds...
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken...
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom'.

You'd think he was writing about Rizpah! Five months! Paul echoes Rizpah's sentiment and passion in 1 Corinthians 13, does he not? 'Love suffers long. Love is kind. Love endures all things. Love never fails'. What about Solomon? 'Love is as strong as death'. What a lesson in love Rizpah gives us, and we all ought to thank God for a mother's love if we knew it. Parents here tonight, you ought to love your children fiercely, just as Rizpah did even in death. There are some children in our world and in this district even who have never experienced the protecting love of a mother, or a father for that matter - let us, as the children of God who should show love more than anybody, manifest it to them for Jesus' sake. Let us all, as believers, obey the Lord Jesus who said: 'A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another'.

It is evident that her love was manifest in devotion, and love to the Lord Jesus should be the same. We ought to be completely and utterly devoted and surrendered to Him...
Not only does Rizpah give us a lesson in love to others, but she gives us a lesson in love to the Lord. It is evident that her

love was manifest in devotion, and love to the Lord Jesus should be the same. We ought to be completely and utterly devoted and surrendered to Him: persevering, persisting, determined - and the most obvious place that that determination should be manifested surely is in prayer. So we get a lesson from Rizpah in loss, a lesson in love to others and to the Lord, and a lesson in prayer. Do you see her, spreading her sackcloth prayer mat, if you like, on the rock of Gibeah: resolute to stay there for as long as it takes! Like old twisted Jacob, she is not letting go until she gets a blessing.

Now, if an earthly king like David could yield to Rizpah's demands, how much more do you think our heavenly Father will hear us, will hear a mother's prayer and a father's prayer, and a child's prayer? I just wonder had the Lord Jesus this story in mind when He told the story in - if you turn with me to it - Luke 18. Think of Rizpah as we read these verses together, Luke 18 verse 1: 'The Lord Jesus spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that

city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily'.

Our Heavenly Father is not an unjust judge. Though David had a heart after God, he had an impure heart, an ill-motivated heart at times, but our Heavenly Father has a heart toward us. He knows our need before we ask it, and when we ask, He says: 'Ask and it's given, seek and you'll find, knock and the door will be opened'. But that statement that Jesus spoke - 'Ask, seek, knock' - is in this sense: 'Keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking'. One of the common ingredients with all prayer warriors in the Bible and Christian history is this persistent determination that we see personified in Rizpah.

George Muller, a great man of faith and prayer - and we're used to hearing about all the answers to prayer that God gave

in an instant to George Muller, but perhaps not so familiar with a statement like this that he made on one occasion: 'The great point', of prayer that is, 'is never to give up until the answer comes. I have been praying 63 years and 8 months for one man's conversion'. The story continues, Muller said, 'He is not saved yet, but he will be. How can it be otherwise? I am praying!'. That might be too simplistic for some of you, but the day came when Muller's friend did receive Christ - but Muller never saw it, because it was on the day Muller's coffin was being lowered into the grave at the funeral service. Round that open grave, which seemed to be a gaping hole, a void of defeat in Muller's life where that prayer was never answered, that hole was a willingness, an openness on the part of God, a door that was left ajar for a prayer that was persevering enough not to quit right to the end, and that man was saved at his funeral!

I love the writings of E.M. Bounds, I'm forever recommending them to you, on prayer. I may have told you before that he had two sons, one was a believer the other wasn't. Bounds died at the age of 90, and his unconverted son was not saved.

He lived until he was 90, and was converted at 90 - but he was converted! Someone has said, in relation to Rizpah: 'We should determine to cover those in sin and those in need with our prayer, so that Satan can't devour them, be it day time or night time'. **If Rizpah says anything to us, surely the lesson of prayer is: don't give up! When you're tempted to let it go, remember Rizpah.**

The only thing that could satisfy the just demands of the holy God of heaven was the shedding of the precious blood of Christ as a righteous, just victim - the just dying for the unjust, the righteous for the unrighteous - that He might bring us to God...

She gives us a lesson in loss, a lesson in love for others and for the Lord, a lesson in prayer - and finally: a lesson on sin. 'What's that lesson?', you say. Sin must be paid for. Time didn't atone for her. Four hundred years passes, the years between this event, Saul slaying the Gibeonites and David being cursed for it in his kingdom. Silver and gold could not atone for it as far as the Gibeonites were concerned. There had to be justice, and that justice demanded blood. Galatians

chapter 3 and verse 13 tells us that 'Cursed is everyone that hangs upon a tree', quoting the law in Deuteronomy - but in the context that Paul speaks those words, he says: 'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree'. Yes, sin must be paid for, but - hallelujah! - sin has been paid for! We are 'not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot'. We sing it:

'Nothing can for sin atone,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus'.

The only thing that could satisfy the just demands of the holy God of heaven was the shedding of the precious blood of Christ as a righteous, just victim - the just dying for the unjust, the righteous for the unrighteous - that He might bring us to God. Christ being made a curse, that we might be delivered from the curse! It's a lesson on sin. How many men hung on the tree? Seven. You know, don't you, that seven is the

number of perfection or completeness in the word of God. What did our Lord Jesus Christ cry from that accursed tree? 'It is finished!', complete satisfaction, He has put away sin before God so that men might believe and be saved. Jesus hanging naked on a tree - why? Because sin lies at your door, because it lies at the door of my heart.

I'll never forget visiting St Giles Cathedral, I think it was in Glasgow - I get mixed up whether it was Glasgow or Edinburgh. There's a wonderful stained glass window in the church, and it portrays a picture of the crucifixion. There at Calvary's Mount are these three crosses, and the Lord at the centre, two thieves either side. But the artist portrays a great throng around the foot of the cross, and that whole crowd is turned facing the spectacle, probably shouting abuse. The guide that was taking us round the church asked could we see anything unusual in the crowd. Of course we couldn't, until he pointed out that right at the bottom right-hand corner there was a face that was not looking toward the cross, but was looking toward us. Of course, these artists have reasons for doing these things as you may know, and the reason for that

one face facing out, he said, was to draw us into the crowd - to realise that we had a part, our sin laid on Him. Do you know that? Your sin, your present sin He bore.

Armoni and Mephibosheth died for the sins of their father, but there was another Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, and because of an oath and a covenant between Jonathan and David before God, Mephibosheth was saved. We can be saved also if we take God at His word and trust in the new covenant: Christ shed His blood for our sins, His body was broken for our sins. If that is our experience, we can say like Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, 'Mine by covenant, mine forever; mine by oath, and mine by blood'. What a lesson we have from Rizpah. In spite of these circumstances, she got through with determinate devotion and love that birthed hope in her heart. Good came out of this situation, and how much we can learn from it in loss, in love, in prayer and even in our sin. May God bless His word to all our hearts tonight.

Father, we thank You tonight that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ, nothing in this life or even in death. Lord, give us a sense of that everlasting, eternal, never

dying love in our hearts now, all of us. Help us to show this strong love, divine agape love to others. Part us now with **Your blessing, we pray, and whatever Rizpah-situation we find ourselves in, Lord, let us not lose hope.** For Christ's sake, Amen.