

Introduction

This 25th chapter of First Samuel continues to present to us the life of David. We learn of David's dealings with a man whose name means foolish. And Nabal lives up to his name. He is very rich and very selfish. He employs shepherds to care for the some 3,000 sheep and 1,000 goats that he owns. While tending the sheep out in the fields, Nabal's shepherds moved among David and his men, who served as protection for them. One of the shepherds said of David's men, they "were very good to us, and we suffered no harm, and we did not miss anything when we were in the fields, as long as we were with them. They were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep." No doubt Nabal would have had fewer sheep to shear if not for David.

Having afforded this kind of protection and good treatment to the shepherds of Nabal, David seeks from the wealthy Nabal some provisions for a feast day. He sends ten of his men and instructs them to be respectful. There is no reason to think that Nabal will refuse what with his wealth and the fact that he has benefitted significantly from the kindness of David.

Nabal, however, refuses. "My, my, my" is the chorus he sings. Why should I take MY bread and MY water and MY meat and give it to strangers? Nabal was selfish and unwilling to admit that his prosperity in some measure was due to the favor of David and his men. But not only does Nabal refuse to share, he insults David as well. He asks, "who is the son of Jesse?" He asserts David and his group are just a bunch of servants who have deserted their masters. They are a bunch of irrelevant riffraff and unworthy for Nabal to share anything of what belongs to him.

When David learns of the boorish treatment, he is highly offended. He is furious. The way Nabal responded was selfish, mean, and haughty. Nabal had returned David evil for good. David is ready to deal out retribution. David says to his men, "Every man strap on his sword!" And every man strapped on his sword. David also strapped on his sword. Four hundred of the men went up with David to take vengeance on Nabal. David was determined to kill every male belonging to his house.

Meanwhile, an unnamed servant of Nabal approaches Nabal's wife Abigail. She is nothing like her worthless husband. He was harsh and a scoundrel. She was discerning and beautiful. The young man warns Abigail of the danger precipitated by Nabal's foolishness. Harm is intended for the entire household. Making haste, Abigail swings into action. She prepares 200 loaves, two skins of wine, five sheep, as well as parched grain, raisins, and figs and loads it all on two donkeys. Without telling her husband, she heads off to intercept David before it is too late. And she does. And here at verse 23 is where I want to begin reading this morning.

[Read 1 Samuel 25:23-43 and Pray]

This text is about how God kept David from committing a grievous sin. I want us to consider it under three headings. First, we will consider the sin David almost committed. Second, we will pay attention to the restraint God orchestrated through Abigail. Third, we will observe the outcome God brought about for Nabal, David, and Abigail.

I. The Sin David Almost Committed.

Nabal was a bad guy. The marks of his sinfulness are written throughout this text. He was a drunkard. He was foolish. He did not acknowledge that what was his was actually God's. He was bull-headed. He was worthless and would listen to no one. His marriage clearly was in shambles. He is exhibit "A" of the fact that wealth does not deter misery. There is no question that Nabal was evil and he did evil to David though David had done him good.

When people treat you and me like Nabal treated David, we don't like it—do we? Neither did David. He was offended at the arrogance and ingratitude of a man who thought only of himself. It was an affront to David's fleshly sinful nature just like such treatment is an affront to ours. Yet David's action was extreme. He did not determine to go to Nabal and give him a piece of his mind on the matter. He resolved to do to Nabal similar to what Saul had done to the priests at Nob. Remember when he was furious for the help they had innocently given to David? He killed 85 priests of the Lord and every living thing in their town? Well David's determination does not go quite that far, but it is nevertheless staggering. The bottom line is David was taking justice in his own hand. He was determined to return evil for evil. The sin David almost committed is taking vengeance for himself, delivering himself from the evil done him by another. Abigail mentions it and David mentions it. She said that the Lord had restrained him from "saving with his own hand." David blessed the Lord because he had kept him "from working salvation with his own hand." Humans are to leave personal vengeance with the Lord.

The offenses of others toward us never warrant our vengeance. Let me say it again, "the offenses of others against us never warrant our own vengeance." I am not talking about self-defense. I am not saying that civil government does not have a legitimate role. I am asserting what Paul instructed in Romans 12:17-21: "Repay no one evil for evil ... live peaceably with all ... never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' ... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Vengeance belongs to God. He is the righteous judge. All sins are first and foremost sins against God. Sins committed by human beings against us are minuscule—they are dust particles on the scale—compared to the mountain of guilt that is incurred by human sin against God. And sin against human beings is sin against God. When I do you wrong, I am also doing God wrong. And my guilt for doing wrong against holy God to whom I owe my life and breath is incalculable compared to the sin I commit against another sinner. For another human to sin against me is not nothing, but it is almost that in comparison to their guilt before God.

There's no question that Nabal had done wrong. But David is a sinner as surely as Nabal. And he is about to enact judgment when Nabal is far guiltier before God than he is before David. It is wrong. It is sin.

Maybe in smaller ways, but you and I are tempted to sin in this way almost every single day. People do us wrong. They insult us. They take without gratitude. They harm us with their words. They are selfish when we are in need. They disregard our rights. They take advantage of us. They dismiss us as unimportant. It happens on the road. It happens in the grocery store. It happens at work, in the neighborhood, in our homes, and even in the church. And you know what? We do this to others as well. Every one of these sins represents a failure to love God and a failure to love our neighbor. But we are instructed not to take justice into our own hands. Leave it with the Lord. Refusing to leave justice in the hands of the Lord is the sin that David almost committed in a big way—bloodguilt and self-administered justice. What about you? Are you aware of your

judgmentalism toward others? Do you recognize your tendency to retaliate when other people mistreat you? Do you get back? Do you get even? This is not the will of God. It does not accomplish his purpose for you and me. It is so ingrained in us we are likely to overlook it. To overcome evil with good is hard. So much of our flesh reacts against it, but we were saved in part so that we, having been set free from the power of sin, would do just that.

II. The Restraint God Orchestrated Through Abigail.

David was on his way. He was in motion to carry out justice in his own defense. But God. In grace God was orchestrating restraint to hold him back. Truly God has mercy upon whom he has mercy. And in this case God is having mercy upon David. Abigail is God's tool for restraint. And I want you to see how she came. There are a number of remarkable facets of Abigail's approach which demonstrate the truth that she was a woman of discernment.

I want you to take note of the humility with which she approached David. She got down off of her donkey and fell before David on her face and bowed to the ground. The writer is concerned that we get this picture of humility; he adds then that Abigail fell down at David's feet. There is no question here that she is humbling herself before David. She is coming to confront David for a sin which he is in the process of committing. But she does not come with a loud rebuke and condemnation. She comes with a spirit of gentleness not pretending to be better in heart than David, but knowing that he is the Lord's anointed, and that she too is a sinner, she comes without pretense, without arrogance, without an attitude of holier-than-thou.

There are times when we are called upon by the Lord to confront one another. If you want a visual lesson in how to make the approach, here it is. You humble yourself and you speak with gentleness and respect like Abigail.

Second, Abigail makes a priestly appeal. Look at verses 24-25. Abby says, "On me alone, my lord, be the guilt. Please let your servant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your servant. Let not my lord regard this worthless fellow, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he." She is not mincing any words. Nabal IS a bad guy. She is not claiming otherwise. But what she is doing is asking that David receive the gift that she has brought and forgive the trespass of Nabal. That's down in verse 27. Abigail makes the point that she did not participate in the sin, but she is willing to own the guilt. She is seeking to satisfy the anger of David so that he will relent concerning his intent to bring justice to bear upon Nabal.

What a graphic illustration of the priestly work of Christ Jesus is this woman Abigail. Jesus did not participate in our sin. He is innocent. In fact he is without any blemish whatsoever. He is altogether righteous. As a sacrificial lamb, he is spotless. Yet in the depths of humility he came. And in effect Jesus prostrates himself before God the father to represent sinners and to intercede for them. His plea is that the Father accept the offering he brings and forgive the trespasses of the sinners he represents. Hebrews 8:3 says that every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices. And when Christ appeared as a high priest, he presented to God his own blood to secure forgiveness and redemption. Hebrews 9:24 states that "Christ has entered ... into heaven itself now to appear in the presence of God in our behalf. ... He has appeared once for all ... to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." He ever lives to intercede for us.

Do you see yourself to be a sinner? You know you have offended God with your pride, your arrogance, your living as though your life belongs to you. You may be forgiven because of the work of Christ. If you will turn to him and trust in His work on the cross and resurrection; if you will take him to be your priest to offer to God propitiation for your guilt, you will be redeemed. Believe on the

Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Abigail's approach to David helps us see the beauty of Christ's work for sinners.

But there is more. Thirdly, Abigail offers a persuasive argument. She reminds David that those who rest in the Lord for their justice and protection will indeed be protected by him. Look at how she articulates that God will deal with evil men. In verse 26 she says, "Let your enemies and those who seek to do evil to my lord be as Nabal." She knows he is going to be judged by the Lord. Verse 29 continues, "If men rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, the life of my lord shall be bound up in the bundle of the living in the care of the Lord your God. And the lives of your enemies he shall sling out as from the hollow of a sling." What a fitting image for David. He well knew what it was like for a stone to be slung out of the hollow of a sling. Yes, let the Lord take care of the wicked and he will. He will keep his people safe. David, she is saying, stay true to the Lord and he will keep you in the hollow of his hand. Furthermore, she says that to refrain from evil is to preserve a clear conscience (v. 31).

This is true for all God's people isn't it. Here are key matters to preach to ourselves when temptation rears its head. Speak persuasively to yourself of the joy and peace of a clear conscience before God. You and I will NEVER regret doing the right thing, the God-honoring thing. It will never haunt us that we obeyed God. It will never weigh down our shame to resist the pull to an evil act, word, or thought. Sin plagues our consciences and destroys our peace. When we sin, we step out from the Lord. God will punish sinners. Why should we act like them? No!

Thankfully, David listened to Abigail's words. He accepted her approach. He told her in the end, "I have obeyed your voice, and I have granted your petition." He also shares in praising God for his providential provision of restraint. What joy rings in these words in verses 32-33, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from working salvation with my own hand!"

How many times has God in his providence worked to restrain us from evil? Countless untold times! Praise God for his mercy and grace. You see those who serve God, who are the called, who are the saved, we were of the same nature as the rest of the world by birth. Even after being born again we have to deal with the flesh. And we are prone to wander. We are prone to leave the God we love. If he did not hold us fast, if he did not intervene, we would be lost. By grace he restrains. And often he uses other people to accomplish it. Pastors and teachers are told to preach the word, to reprove, rebuke, and exhort. We are to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly teaching and admonishing one another. God uses the church to restrain. He uses circumstances to restrain. He uses his word to restrain. Let us rejoice in God's restraining grace and call out to him for more.

Before we leave Abigail, I think we should also note that whether she knew it or not, she spoke prophetically. She is not only helping David avoid sin, she is encouraging his heart in the promise of God. In verse 28, she says, "for the Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house." Then at the conclusion of her dialogue, down in verse 31 she points to a time when the Lord will have "dealt well with my lord." She is saying that she is certain that God will fulfill for David his place as king of Israel with a lasting dynasty. You see these in fact are the words spoken to David by Nathan when the LORD in 2 Samuel 7 makes a covenant with David and promises that he will make David a house. It is a promise not only of a Davidic dynasty. It is a promise for a specific descendant of David to have an established throne forever. And he will build a house for the name of the Lord. Now David's son Solomon built a house for the LORD, the Temple. BUT David's greater son built a

greater house for the LORD. It is the church which is made up of the elect of God. As Peter writes to God's chosen people, "As you come to [Christ] . . . you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house." Christ is our King, and we are blessed to belong to his kingdom.

Abigail, confident of David's rise to the throne, appeals that when he is seated there that he remember her. This is verse 31. "And when the Lord has dealt well with my lord, remember your servant." It is as though she desires to have a place in that kingdom. This request to not be forgotten bears semblance with another. Crucified on either side of Jesus was a thief. During those harrowing moments of suffering, one of those thieves had a change of heart. He owned his sentence of condemnation as just. And he expressed his conviction that Jesus had done nothing wrong. Speaking to Jesus he said, "remember me when you come into your kingdom." In reply, Jesus, the greater David said, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

It is the desire of those who follow Christ to be with him in his kingdom. He fights the Lord's battles. He has conquered sin and death by dying an atoning death and rising again. And his answer to those who own him as king and yearn to be remembered is "Today you will be Me."

III. The Outcome the LORD Achieved.

The outcome is threefold. It pertains to Nabal, David, and Abigail.

God carried out vengeance upon Nabal. After he came out of his drunken stupor, Abigail related about her encounter with David and he was stricken. He became like a stone. Ten days later the Lord struck Nabal and he died. The justice of the Lord was executed. All Nabal's wealth and all his earthly delights won't do him a bit of good. The Lord visited him in judgment. It was as Abigail had said. The Lord would sling out as from a sling the lives of the enemies of David. And she had said, "Let your enemies and those who seek to do you evil be as Nabal." And so it will be for all the enemies of David's greater son. Nabal reminds us of the severity and suddenness of the judgment of God. If you are not with him, you are against him.

In smiting Nabal, the LORD avenged David. Vengeance is mine says the Lord. That is where we need to leave it. Judge not lest you be judged. God will avenge his people and he will preserve them even though they face the harshest of foes. The greatest hostility and arrogance ever demonstrated came from those who rejected, scoffed at, and pierced the Lord Jesus. And what vengeance will be poured out on them. Revelation 1:7 says, "Behold, he is coming with the clouds and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him."

God smote Nabal. God avenged and preserved David. And God relieved Abigail. Her life must have been a nightmare—being married to a man like Nabal. She was resourceful and discerning, and he was a selfish, boorish, and foolish man. What a relief for her that the Lord took him away. She had appealed with David to remember her when the Lord dealt well with him, when his enemies were avenged and he was king over Israel. But she didn't have to wait until then. David sent for her when he learned of Nabal's death and made her his wife. When she got the news, the text says, "She HURRIED with David's messengers to become his wife." The eagerness reflects her excitement over the grand invitation and privilege to the wife of God's anointed one.

How much more should we be hurried to be with the greater David, the Lord Jesus, who is the husband of the church.

Conclusion

As I close let me just say something about a man having more than one wife. Here is one of a number of instances in the Old Testament. Abigail joined Ahinoam of Jezreel as a wife to David. David just avoided grievous sin and now he marries a second wife and it seems in the text like an acceptable thing. What are we to make of men having multiple wives in the Old Testament? Someone asked me a question about it recently, accusing these men of being outrageously promiscuous.

Well, it is quite clear that polygamy was not regarded as evil during those days. It was not seen as a blatant rejection of God's word. It seems, therefore, that God allowed polygamy in the Old Testament times. There is good reason for it. Life for an unmarried woman then was quite difficult. It was almost impossible for an unmarried woman to provide for and protect herself. Unmarried women were often subject to slavery, prostitution, or starvation. By marriage a man was taking responsibility for the care and provision of his wife or wives. So living in the home of a polygamist may not have been ideal, but in many cases it was far better than the alternative.

Polygamy was never established as God's ideal. From the beginning the ideal has been one man for one woman. The New Testament returns to this ideal and even requires that for one to serve as an elder in the church, he must be a one-woman man. So, God's allowance for polygamy in the Old Testament was a merciful provision for women but its allowance does not mean it was the ideal. In fact, the practice of polygamy actually highlights aspects of why it is not ideal. Everywhere there was polygamy there was also jealousy, conflict, and chaos. So while it was allowed, it was never the standard, and in the age of the New Covenant, it has no place for us.