

June 12, 2016
Sunday Morning Service
Series: *The Life of David*
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from 1 Samuel 25.

1. Why would a mother name her son “Nabal” if it means fool?
2. What are the traits of Nabal in this story that qualify him as a fool?
3. How does this text wash with Jesus’ warning not to call a person a fool?
4. What is the best way to handle a fool if you are thrust into a relationship with such a person (i.e. work, school, family, neighbor)?

DEALING WITH A FOOL **1 Samuel 25**

Solomon described the fool forty- five times in the collection of Proverbs. He assessed this person as arrogant, incorrigible, loud, talkative, and determined to be heard. The fool acts shamefully but either does not know or does not care because he is of the erroneous opinion that he is right and others are wrong. As a result, he sabotages relationships, causes inter-personal conflicts, and brings shame to his parents. So serious is the trait of being a fool that Jesus warned us not to angrily and unjustifiably attach that name to a person. If a person truly is a fool, it might be necessary to say so, as Jesus and the Old Testament prophets did. But it is grievous to slanderously label a person “fool” if he or she is not one.

So how do we 21st century Christians deal with people who are truly arrogant, incorrigible, and unteachable? Maybe you have worked with people like this. Do we answer a fool according to his folly or not according to his folly (Proverbs 26:4,5)? Do we ignore the person? Do we avoid the person, try to get her fired, say nasty things about him to others?

Abigail taught David and us a very important principle about dealing with fools. Probably most of the time, the best way to deal with a fool is to turn him over to God. If we really trust God to answer our prayers and take care of the matter, we can rest contentedly in God’s promise.

Almost as an aside in this story, we read that Samuel died and all Israel gathered to mourn him as they buried him in his house at Ramah (1 Samuel 25:1). *Then David rose and went down to the wilderness of Paran.* It was a major shift in God’s work with His nation. The age of leadership by judges had passed. The Theocracy, in which God personally ruled the people through priests or judges, was over. Now God would rule the nation through kings. And yet we discover that most of the time the kings were not willing to cooperate with God.

While Saul was the first king in this new system, God would begin the monarchy in earnest with a king who shared His own heart. In that vein, David needed to learn important lessons, like how to deal with a fool – of which he would no doubt have many in the kingdom. God sent a wonderful woman to teach David how to trust Him to take care of fool-centered difficulties.

A Humble Request Rebuffed (vv.2-13).

David desired to provide for his followers (vv.2-9). As we consider how he expressed that desire to the man who could help, we will benefit by considering the character sketch that is outlined briefly in verses two and three. Here we read about the man in Maon whose business was in Carmel (v.2). Maon was near where David was staying (v.2). The man was very rich (v.2). His name was Nabal which literally means “fool” which his wife admitted he was (v.25). He was harsh and behaved badly (v.3). In stark contrast to his character, the man’s wife, Abigail was beautiful and discerning (v.3).

By the way, it is important to see that he was a Calebite. Caleb's people also founded David's home town Bethlehem. That virtually made David and Nabal distant kinsmen (v.3b).

The situation or setting of the story was a sheep shearing. David heard that Nabal was shearing sheep (v.4). Sheep shearing was a time of "taking profits" from the flock. It was like harvest time for the farmer. It was a joyous time, typically accompanied by feasting and celebration. Common sense dictated that this was an appropriate time for David to ask for a little recompense for having guarded Nabal's possessions over the past months.

Therefore, David sent a reasonable request by the hand of ten of his young men (v.5a). The offer he sent required the men to greet Nabal in David's name, which implied Nabal knew his distant relative David (v.5b). The young men were to offer peace to this man's household, which was a pretty standard greeting. *And thus you shall greet him: "Peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have" (v.6)*. They were to remind Nabal that David and his men had protected his business, a fact that his own employees could verify (v.7,8). And having laid this ground work, the young men were to make the request for whatever Nabal feels is appropriate. *Therefore let my young men find favor in your eyes, for we come on a feast day. Please give whatever you have at hand to your servants and to your son David (8b)*. The young men did as David had instructed them to do and then they waited (v.9).

Rejection and Response (vv.10-13).

Nabal heard what the young men said, and then flatly rebuffed David's request. In the process, he implied that David was a rebel. And Nabal answered David's servants, *"Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants these days who are breaking away from their masters" (v.10)*. Either Nabal did not know that David had been anointed to be his next king, or he didn't care. Actually, he was the kind of guy who bowed to no king. He fancied himself to be his own king. Proud, arrogant, self-centered, haughty, rude, incorrigible, unthankful are a few traits that come to mind. In character Nabal was a lot like King Saul.

These traits sound very much like the common sins of people in our day as Paul promised it would be. He warned Timothy, *For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (2 Timothy 3:2-4)*. Some of you have tried to work with people like this and learned that no one can relate well to such people.

Nabal proved that he was selfish. He argued, *"Shall I take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers and give it to men who come from I do not know where?" (v.11)*. Notice the emphasis on the personal pronoun "My." Maybe Nabal didn't know who these men were, but he should have. How could they act as guards for his servants and flocks and him be unaware of it? What he really meant was, "I don't care how much these people have done for me. I didn't hire them."

How would you respond to that kind of guy? Would you feel justified in being angry enough to get even? David reacted according to fleshly instincts. His men came back and gave a faithful report of Nabal's response. *So David's young men turned away and came back and told him all this (v.12)*. It appears that instantly David lowered himself to Nabal's level. *And David said to his men, "Every man strap on his sword!" And every man of them strapped on his sword. David also strapped on his sword. And about four hundred men went up after David, while two hundred remained with the baggage (v.13)*.

David was determined to teach Mr. Proud-and-Arrogant a lesson by acting proud and arrogant himself. Here is an important principle: Never wrestle with a pig. You both get dirty and the pig likes it. So how should David have responded? How should we respond at such times? On several occasions David had already learned that vengeance belongs to God. He could have simply turned Nabal over to God. In fact, that is actually the way the story works out. How many times does God have to prove that He is faithful to His promises before we learn to react according to that truth?

A Wise Young Man Averted Disaster (vv.14-22).

Nabal had a wise servant. That young servant went back to the house and explained the volatile situation to Nabal's wife. *But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, "Behold, David sent messengers out of the wilderness to greet our master, and he railed at them. Yet the men 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 went with them. They were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep" (vv.14-16).* This was not a case of the guy "ratting" out his boss or whining to the boss's wife. When there is a legitimate concern, or as in this case, danger to be averted, it is right to seek help.

However, there is a problem in this situation. Nabal was the servant's employer. There was no one superior to Nabal to whom the servant could go for help. What was he to do? It would appear from the man's response that Abigail had a reputation among the servants for being wise. Plus, she would have had more influence on Nabal than anyone else. So the servant told her the story.

Notice how this servant manifested discernment. He told Nabal's wife, *"Now therefore know this and consider what you should do, for harm is determined against our master and against all his house, and he is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him" (v.17).* Obviously, the guy understood that David was going to show up with his little army and do a lot of damage. He understood that the pending disaster was Nabal's fault because he was notoriously incorrigible. He was hoping that Abigail had a plan.

The lesson is clear. When the person in charge is a fool, you need to work around him in order to circumvent damage to the company or to a lot of innocent people. Maybe the classic illustration of this is the comic Dilbert that shows up in the daily newspaper. The writer of the comic has a good sense of the foolishness that takes place in the average collection of cubicles in the business world. When the pointed haired boss can only make bad choices because of his arrogance, it is time to point out the problem to someone else. But what if that doesn't work? Hold on to that question.

Nabal had a wise servant and he also had a wise wife. She did what her leader or head should have done (vv.18-22). She prepared the provisions that David had requested (v.18). She sent her servants ahead of her because they would be quicker (v.19). She rode under

the cover of the mountain in order not to be detected by the fool (v.20). And lo and behold, she intercepted an angry man on that mountain path (vv.21-22). What a coincidence that she would happen to choose the right path to head off David. Or was this simply God's arrangement for the crossing of paths?

David was justifiably angry. He had told his men as much while they were strapping on their arms to go and exact justice! Now David had said, *"Surely in vain have I guarded all that this fellow has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him, and he has returned me evil for good. God do so to the enemies of David and more also, if by morning I leave so much as one male of all who belong to him" (vv.21-22).* David knew that he had done a good thing in protecting Nabal's possessions. Now his good work had been repaid with evil. Therefore, he made an oath, but wisely, rather than invoking God's name on the oath, left it to God to exact vengeance. How would a wise woman deal with a man who is justifiably angry but about to act in a way that will have serious, shameful ramifications?

A Wise Woman Protected David's Reputation (vv.23-35).

Abigail articulated God's will (vv.23-31). She patiently explained to David that it is not God's will for His servants to bring guilt on themselves by acting rashly. She understood well the danger of David acting rashly. But notice that she did not yell, or nag, or berate, or threaten him. In fact, she opened the conversation by humbling herself. *When Abigail saw David, she hurried and got down from the donkey and fell before David on her face and bowed to the ground (v.23).* She pleaded for a hearing. Essentially she said, "Just listen to what I need to say." *She fell at his feet and said, "On me alone, my lord, be the guilt. Please let your servant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your servant" (v.24).* She admitted that David was dealing with a fool. *"Let not my lord regard this worthless fellow, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name, and folly is with him" (v.25a).* She admitted that she did not have opportunity at the time to correct Nabal's foolish response. *"But I your servant did not see the young men of my lord, whom you sent" (v.26).*

But most important is the fact that Abigail brought God's will and control into the picture. *"Now then, my lord, as the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, because the LORD has restrained you from bloodguilt and from saving with your own hand"* (v.26a). Because Abigail expected God to bring things out for His own glory, it was also fitting that she expressed a genuine desire that David would have what is best. She told David, *"Now then let your enemies and those who seek to do evil to my lord be as Nabal"* (v.26b). That is to say, "Anyone who is opposed to you is a fool"

Abigail assured David that he did not need to defend himself in this issue because it is always God's will to bring to pass the promises He has made to His servants (vv.27-31). Notice Abigail's confidence in what God had promised David. *"For the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the LORD (v.28). The life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living in the care of the LORD your God (v.29a). And the lives of your enemies he shall sling out as from the hollow of a sling (v.29b). And when the LORD has done to my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you and has appointed you prince over Israel (v.30). And when the LORD has dealt well with my lord"* (v.31).

Abigail said what she said because she believed God's promises. It is amazing that she perceived this deep level of truth while Nabal, the Ziphites, Saul, and others seemed to be devoid of all such truth. Because she trusted God, she humbled herself before this mere man who was on the run for his life. *"And now let this present that your servant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who follow my lord (v.27). Please forgive the trespass of your servant (v.28). And when the LORD has dealt well with my lord, then remember your servant"* (v.31).

Because she was humble, she was more concerned for David's reputation than for her own safety. *"And when the LORD has done to my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you and has appointed you prince over Israel, my lord shall have no cause of grief or pangs of conscience for having shed blood without cause or for my lord working salvation himself"* (vv.30-31).

Let's consider briefly some important lessons for us to learn from Abigail's reaction. When we trust God's promises, we can rise

above mere emotions. When we trust God's promises, we can cut through all the haze of actions, words, and threats to perceive the root issues. When we trust God's promises, we are not ashamed to humble ourselves before others. When we trust God's promises, we can wait on Him to do His work in the lives of other people.

The good news is that David responded to Abigail's advice according to divine wisdom. He was able to recognize God's hand in the event. He realized that he did not just accidentally run into Abigail on the path up the mountain. God had specifically sent Abigail at that precise moment. *And David said to Abigail, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me!"* (v.32) David also recognized that Abigail's discretion kept him from acting foolishly. He told her, *"Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from working salvation with my own hand!"* (v.33). He admitted that it was the living God who used her to restrain his hand from hurting even Abigail in the process. *"For as surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, who has restrained me from hurting you . . ."* (v.34).

Do we see the amazing hand of God in all of this situation? Notice that Abigail humbled herself before God because she believed God's promises. As a result, she prevented David from blemishing his reputation. Because she trusted God's promises about David, she kept David from killing her family and possibly herself. Now the really amazing thing. She opened the way for God to arrange circumstances so that she would actually become David's wife and live in the king's palace with him. Trusting God makes a lot of sense.

We might be astonished to realize that the mighty and successful warrior David actually **obeyed** the humble woman. *Then David received from her hand what she had brought him. And he said to her, "Go up in peace to your house. See, I have obeyed your voice, and I have granted your petition"* (v.35). He even admitted that he obeyed her. Because Abigail humbled herself before God and the man who planned to kill her husband, she was blessed. David even granted peace on her house which included the rascal Nabal. When we remove ourselves from the conflict and turn it over to God, amazing things happen with people.

God's Will Can Be Breathtaking (vv.36-44).

God killed Nabal. The fool never saw it coming. After he ran off David's men, Nabal carried on his normal lifestyle. When his wife returned from doing God's will, he was holding a feast in his house (v.36). A lavish feast was often connected with the end of sheep shearing. The text tells us that this banquet was like the kind Saul the king would hold. In the festivities Nabal got drunk. That was pretty much in keeping with his character as we know it. Therefore, Abigail withheld the good news that no one was going to die (as if anyone knew or cared at this point).

All appeared to be normal for Nabal. But God often interrupts "normal." In the morning, when Nabal had sobered up, Abigail told him all that had happened and how she kept David from killing him. Immediately Nabal suffered what appears to be a stroke leading to a coma. We cannot say for sure that the frightening news caused the stroke. We can say for sure that this was not a coincidence, because the text states clearly that the Lord struck Nabal and he died (v.38).

God's actions against Nabal draw us back to consider David's oath: *God do so to the enemies of David and more also, if by morning I leave so much as one male of all who belong to him (v.22)*. How much better that God did so, and David did not have to do so.

Having removed the fool from the scene, God put Abigail, the fool's wife, in David's care. It is interesting how God arranges circumstances according to His will. *When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Blessed be the LORD who has avenged the insult I received at the hand of Nabal, and has kept back his servant from wrongdoing. The LORD has returned the evil of Nabal on his own head"(v.39)*.

In his prayer, David thanked God for taking care of his enemy. He thanked God for keeping him from wrongdoing. He thanked God for distributing evil according to His will. And in the process he taught us another lesson for why we must trust God to take care of the conflicts according to His will.

As we rejoice with David that God accomplishes His will, we must at the same time come to grips with the reality that God's will is difficult for us to understand sometimes. Consider the last words of this text. *Then David sent and spoke to Abigail, to take her as his wife. When the servants of David came to Abigail at Carmel, they said to her, "David has sent us to you to take you to him as his wife."*

And she rose and bowed with her face to the ground and said, "Behold, your handmaid is a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord." And Abigail hurried and rose and mounted a donkey, and her five young women attended her. She followed the messengers of David and became his wife. David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel, and both of them became his wives. Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Palti the son of Laish, who was of Gallim (vv39b-44).

Several questions arise from this story. Why did God bless a wise woman's lack of submission to her husband? Why did God bless the woman's secretive meeting with her husband's enemy? Why did God allow David, the man after His own heart, to have three wives at this point (and more to come)? Possible answers to those questions can be, because Nabal chose to be a fool, he forfeited his right to have his wife's submission. God's plan is, *Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord (Colossians 3:18)*. When a husband plays the part of a fool and demands ungodly things, the wife is no longer required to submit. Also, the story of God working with the human race is a story of God never approving of but always working with our weaknesses. And regarding those wives, technically, David was a kinsman redeemer for Abigail in that both he and Nabal had descended from Caleb. The law then allowed for David to take Abigail as wife (Lev 25:25; 27:11; Ruth).

The story reminds us that human relationships are never nice, square boxes with everything black and white and orderly in the box. However, God's promises still apply to all relationships. Most important God is always in control and longs for us to acknowledge His control and commit our conflicts and struggles to His care.