

Abigail's Intervention

1 Samuel 25:14–35 ESV

¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ They were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep. ¹⁷ 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."

¹⁸ Then Abigail made haste and took two hundred loaves and two skins of wine and five sheep already prepared and five seahs of parched grain and a hundred clusters of raisins and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on donkeys. ¹⁹ And she said to her young men, "Go on before me; behold, I come after you." But she did not tell her husband Nabal. ²⁰ And as she rode on the donkey and came down under cover of the mountain, behold, David and his men came down toward her, and she met them. ²¹ 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. ²² 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."

²³ When Abigail saw David, she hurried and got down from the donkey and fell before David on her face and bowed to the ground. ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ 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. But I your servant did not see the young men of my lord, whom you sent. ²⁶ 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, now then let your enemies and those who seek to do evil to my lord be as Nabal. ²⁷ And now let this present that your servant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who follow my lord. ²⁸ Please forgive the trespass of your servant. For the Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the Lord, and evil shall not be found in you so long as you live. ²⁹ If men rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, the life of my lord shall be bound 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. ³⁰ 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, ³¹ 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. And when the Lord has dealt well with my lord, then remember your servant."

³² And David said to Abigail, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! ³³ Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from working salvation with my own hand! ³⁴ For as surely as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, who has restrained me from hurting you, unless you had hurried and come to meet me, truly by morning there had not been left to Nabal so much as one male." ³⁵ 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."

Introduction

Nabal's wife Abigail plays a major role in this morning's passage.

In fact, Abigail's speech here in [1 Sam 25](#) represents the longest speech by any woman in the OT.

But it was in last week's sermon passage that 1 Samuel first introduces Abigail.

Specifically, Abigail was described as discerning and beautiful.

Abigail was introduced as the opposite of her husband Nabal.

Nabal is brash and foolish while Abigail is discerning and wise.

In some ways, Abigail is a picture of Lady Wisdom from Proverbs, inviting others to hear and heed her wisdom in order to avoid death and gain life.

Indeed, this entire section can be understood alongside of the book of Proverbs.

Before David are two people: Abigail, who represents wisdom, and Nabal, who represents folly.

David has been ill treated by Nabal.

Nabal returned David's good with evil.

The question before us was: "How would David react?"

Would David react to Nabal according to the wisdom of [Proverbs 19:11](#)?

Proverbs 19:11 ESV

¹¹ Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.

Or, would David respond like a fool in opposition to the wisdom of [Proverbs 20:22](#)?

Proverbs 20:22 ESV

²² Do not say, "I will repay evil"; wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you.

Part of the drama of [1 Samuel 25](#) is that David's initial response to Nabal's insult is to become like Nabal.

In returning evil for Nabal's evil, David himself is tempted to become a fool like Nabal .

But in this morning's passage, David is confronted by Abigail, a lady of wisdom.

And in heeding this lady wisdom, David will keep his hand from seeking vengeance.

With these things in mind, I have divided my sermon into two parts:

1. Receive Wisdom
2. Reject Folly

Receive Wisdom

Nabal's Young Man

In verses 14-17 one of Nabal's young men goes to Abigail and tells her what has happened.

He tells her how David and his men were good to Nabal's flocks.

He explains how, "***They were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep.***"

But despite this good service, Nabal railed at David's men.

And now David and his men are going to take vengeance on Nabal's insult.

Jacob & Esau Again

In verse 18, Abigail responds to this young man's report by preparing gifts to bring to David to appease his wrath.

In addition to the themes of "Wisdom" & "Folly" that I spoke of in the introduction, our passage continues to harken back to the story of Jacob from Genesis.

Last week I noted how there are strong connections between this account from David's life and the time when Jacob served Laban.

Both David and Jacob protected the flocks of and preserved the wealth of Nabal and Laban.

Both David and Jacob were scorned by their masters.

And, in both stories, something significant happens at the time of sheepshearers.

It is that last point that I want to focus in on here.

In [Genesis 30](#), Jacob finally decides to leave Laban's service at the time of sheepshearers.

Here, David sets out to go to Nabal at the time of sheepshearers.

This is where things get quite interesting.

David goes to bring vengeance on Nabal with 400 men.

[Genesis 32](#) also draws attention to a detail about 400 men when Jacob leaves Laban's house.

When Jacob is about return to his ancestral lands and cross the ford of the Jabbok river, we are told that Esau was waiting for Jacob with 400 men.

Up to this point in 1 Samuel, David has typically taken on the characteristics of Jacob.

Like Jacob, David is shrewd and resourceful in the trials against his brother Saul.

However, David has also shown shades of Esau's characteristics.

David is described as "ruddy" like Esau, but he is also a fighting man and a man of the wilderness like Esau.

In this passage, David has become like Esau in a different way.

Here David is ready to get his vengeance on Nabal, as Esau was ready to take vengeance on Jacob.

But what does Jacob do in response to Esau's threat in [Genesis 32](#) and 33?

Jacob sends a great amount of gifts ahead of him in order to appease Esau's wrath.

In our story, David takes on the character of Esau and Abigail takes on the character of Jacob.

And, like Jacob in Genesis, Abigail demonstrates her wisdom through humility.

In verses 23-31 Abigail humbles herself before David and shows great honor and deference to him.

She apologizes for Nabal's folly and pleads with David that he would turn back from saving by his own hand and bringing bloodguilt upon himself.

David's Wisdom

Remember, in this passage, Abigail represents lady wisdom and Nabal represents folly.

Abigail represents the wise choice and she acts in wisdom herself.

And, her wisdom is demonstrated in humility.

If David is going to choose wisdom and avoid folly he will need to demonstrate humility himself.

He will have to stop moving in the direction he's going, admit that he is wrong, and take a new course of action.

In short, to be wise, David will have to repent.

That is what repentance is: turning from one course and setting out on a new one.

Wisdom and Humility

What you must pick up here is the fact that wisdom and humility go hand and hand.

This also means that folly and pride go hand in hand.

The wise person is humble enough to turn away from their own pride and folly.

But the fool is too proud to humble themselves and turn toward wisdom.

But perhaps you hear me speaking of "wisdom" and "folly" and you don't receive them with the amount of weight that the Bible presents them.

These words "wisdom" and "folly" might not carry the same weight in our culture that they did in Bible times.

You may think, "Sure, I don't want to be a 'fool', but there are worse things."

Or, "I'd love to be "wise", but it's not a big deal if I'm not."

The reason this would be a bad approach is because the Bible relates wisdom to life and folly to death.

If you are going to choose life, you must choose to walk in the path of wisdom.

However, if you are going to be a fool, you will find yourself down the path to death.

The Paradox of Wisdom

But there is a paradox here:

Foolishness often feels like “life” and wisdom often feels like “death”.

To choose the path of wisdom, the path that leads to life, you must undergo a kind of death in the short term, that leads to life in the long term.

There are all sorts of applications here:

In finances, physical health, childrearing, and learning a new skill you see this.

You must be willing to “die” in the short-term if you are going to be wise in any of these areas.

But, if you do this, you will become wise!

In our passage, David shows his wisdom in his willingness to stop moving in the direction of foolishness pride and to accept the offer of lady wisdom.

And this saves David from a form of death.

Had David carried out his plan he would have proven himself to be no better than Saul or Nabal.

David would have been a fool, and his folly would have lead to death.

But what exactly is the “folly” that David rejects?

The answer leads us to our second point:

Reject Folly

After Abigail pleads with David to forgive Nabal’s trespass, she goes on to declare some pretty incredible things about David’s future in verses 28-30.

In verses 28-30, Abigail declares that: God will make David’s house secure, will fight David’s battles, keep David from evil, destroy David’s enemies, and make David the leader over Israel.

But, in verse 31 she reveals what David would bring upon himself if he moved forward in his folly by killing Nabal and the men of his house.

In verse 31 Abigail reveals that David would be shedding blood without cause and attempting to work salvation for himself.

David’s Patience

You see, up to this point in 1 Samuel, David has been a shining example of patience (another virtue that goes with wisdom and humility).

David refused to lift up his hand against Saul and work salvation for himself.

If David were to kill Saul and claim the throne for himself, his entire reign and kingdom would be compromised from the foundation.

So much of the point of the second half of 1 Samuel is to show that David did not take the throne for himself, but waited for God to raise him up.

But, as I mentioned last week, this account of David and Nabal is a “microcosm” of David’s larger struggle with Saul.

David has been patient, humble, and wise in the way he has dealt with Saul, but what about now?

The prophet Samuel is dead and cannot guide David anymore.

Also, he’s not dealing with someone who ranks above him like Saul, the king.

He’s dealing with someone who ranks below him.

Will David’s humility, patience, and wisdom continue to shine through?

Or will David change course?

Will David no try to work salvation for himself instead of waiting on the Lord?

This is the “folly” that David must reject.

He must reject the foolishness of seeking vengeance and trying to work salvation for himself.

And one of the reasons David must reject this folly is because of what such folly would bring...

Vengeance

In verse 31, Abigail specifically points out how David would have cause for grief and pangs of conscience if he shed this blood without cause and attempted to work salvation for himself.

If David carried through with this vengeance, David would be no better than the likes of Nabal and Saul.

This is one of the great dangers of pursuing vengeance.

As one scholar points out, “In pursuing vengeance we become the twin of the person we are seeking vengeance against.”

So often, when you are wronged, you attempt to retaliate “in kind”.

You try to hurt them in the same way they hurt you.

“An eye for an eye”.

This is what we see going on with David here.

In order to avenge himself on Nabal, David is becoming like Nabal.

Christ’s Humility & Forgiveness

Thankfully, David rejects his own foolish pride and receives Abigail’s gifts and wisdom.

In verses 32-35 David blesses Abigail for keeping him from this bloodguilt and from attempting to work salvation with his own hand.

David did not become like Nabal and Saul here.

Instead, he showed humility, showing himself a man after God's own heart.

It is here that I want to highlight how David points us to Christ.

Like David, Jesus did not pursue vengeance against those who caused him suffering and death.

In righteous vengeance Jesus could have called upon legions of angels to destroy those who opposed him and put Him to death.

But Jesus, like David, did not raise up His hand to work salvation for himself, entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

What we see in both David and Jesus is humility.

But, there is a way that the humility of Christ differs from David's humility.

You see, David's humility distances him from the sin and foolish pride of Nabal.

And generally, this is how humility works; it moves you away from sin and the path of death.

But, in the Gospel, we see something quite different in Christ's humility.

In the humility of the incarnation Jesus becomes like us.

He takes on our sinful human flesh in order that he might save us.

Unlike David, the humility of Christ does not lead him away from our sin and death, it leads Him toward us.

In the wisdom of God, Jesus was humiliated and suffered death and judgement for us.

Jesus' humility drew him to the path of death and toward the likes of sinners like you and like me.

In his humiliation, we who deserve to be humbled, are raised up and saved from our own folly through the cross, the foolishness of God.

So remember this morning that you are a fool, but God, through the folly of the Gospel, has determined to save fools like you and me, in order that we might be found in Christ, in who are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit! AMEN!