

1 Samuel 25:1–13 ESV

¹ Now Samuel died. And all Israel assembled and mourned for him, and they buried him in his house at Ramah.

Then David rose and went down to the wilderness of Paran. ² And there was a man in Maon whose business was in Carmel. The man was very rich; he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. He was shearing his sheep in Carmel. ³ Now the name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife Abigail. The woman was discerning and beautiful, but the man was harsh and badly behaved; he was a Calebite. ⁴ David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep. ⁵ So David sent ten young men. And David said to the young men, “Go up to Carmel, and go to Nabal and greet him in my name. ⁶ And thus you shall greet him: ‘Peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have. ⁷ I hear that you have shearers. Now your shepherds have been with us, and we did them no harm, and they missed nothing all the time they were in Carmel. ⁸ Ask your young men, and they will tell you. 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.’ ”

⁹ When David’s young men came, they said all this to Nabal in the name of David, and then they waited. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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?” ¹² So David’s young men turned away and came back and told him all this. ¹³ 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.

Introduction

In last week’s sermon I spoke about the significance of Samuel’s death and the prophets in general.

Today I return to the narrative of 1 Samuel, but Samuel’s death still looms over story.

One of the reasons for this is due to the fact that Samuel, like so many major figures from the Old Testament, was more than just a prophet.

Like Moses, Samuel was both a prophet and a type of a priest.

Ever since the death of Eli and Eli’s sons, Samuel has been the chief religious leader in Israel.

Thus, while Samuel isn’t *technically* the high priest, his death functions in a similar way to the death of a high priest.

In [Numbers 25](#), the death of the high priest served as a catalyst for a type of “reset” for the nation.

This morning’s passage begins the account of David’s interaction with Nabal; which comes directly after the announcement of Samuel’s death.

This passage comes at a very significant location in 1 Samuel and many have wondered why God would have *this* account placed at *this* point in David’s story.

In other words, David likely had many events transpire during his time in the wilderness after Samuel's death; why does God want his people to have this account from David's life?

This morning I aim to offer an answer to that question.

I have divided my sermon this morning into three parts:

1. Verses 1-4 presents "A Fresh Start"
2. Verses 5-8 presents "A New Test"
3. Verses 9-13 shows "A Failed Response"

A Fresh Start (vv. 1-4)

As I mentioned above, Samuel's death operates as something like the death of the high priest.

As I already mentioned, the death of the high priest serves as something of a "reset" in Israel and something similar goes on here with the death of Samuel.

In chapters 23 and 24 Saul was getting closer and closer to capturing David.

But after David let Saul live in the cave, Saul has left off of chasing after David.

Here, after we are told of Samuel's death, we see this spelled out for us clearly.

Saul goes to Ramah and David goes to the wilderness of Paran.

Nabal

It is in the wilderness of Paran that David comes into contact with the flocks of Nabal.

This story with Nabal is wedged between two chapters where David has close encounters with King Saul.

Because of this, Nabal serves as something of a "foil" to Saul.

Nabal gives us another insight into who Saul is and what Saul is like.

Nabal the Fool

But in addition to this, this account is another example from 1 Samuel that connects to the story of Jacob.

In Genesis, Jacob flees from Isaac's house because he is not the favored son.

David does the same thing by fleeing from Saul.

When Jacob flees Isaac's house, he came to the house Laban.

Here, David comes to Nabal

This episode in David's life is like the Jacob's time in Laban's house where he works for Laban.

We'll look at the relationship between Nabal and Laban more in the next section, but in these opening verses Nabal is introduced.

Specifically, Nabal is described as a harsh and badly behaved man.

In fact, Nabal's name means "fool".

The Death of the High Priest

David is entering a new stage in his life after Samuel's death.

Samuel's death is typical with the death of a high priest.

In Israel's history, the death of the high priest has preceded a new situation for the nation.

After Aaron, the first high priest died, Israel entered the Promised Land.

Then, at the end of the book of Joshua, after Eleazar, the second high priest died, Israel was settled in the Promised Land.

The high priest's death precedes a new, and a good, situation.

However, this pattern comes with another wrinkle to it.

After these high priests die and God's people find themselves in a new and good situation, there is almost immediately a "fall".

After Aaron's death and Israel's entrance into the Promised Land, they immediately rebelled against God after the victory at Jericho.

Then again, after Eleazar's death, which is recorded in the very last verse of the book of Joshua, the book of Judges begins.

Israel is now settled in the Land, but as Judges shows, they decent into idolatry.

The death of the high priest brings about a good new situation.

But the new situation comes with a test.

How will Israel respond when God brings them into a place of blessing?

So far, Israel has failed their tests.

Like Adam in the garden, God has placed them in a new situation and said, "it is good", only for Israel to turn from God.

This pattern is in the background with Samuel's death and David's time in Paran.

David has been brought into a new and good situation after Samuel's death.

Saul is not longer chasing him.

Indeed, the place David finds himself is Carmel, which literally means "Orchard" or "Garden".

David has been brought into a garden-like setting.

The question is: "Is David going to fall like Israel has before him."

A New Test (vv. 5-8)

Verses 5-8 present the test that David faces in this new situation.

Don't Be Surprised

Before we jump into David's test, there is a quick point of application here at the beginning of this new section.

And that is, don't be surprised when God places in a test or a trial before you.

While we can glean this principle from David's life, it is also the plain teaching of Scripture:

In [1 Peter 4](#) Peter writes,

1 Peter 4:12–13 **ESV**

¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

The Scriptures teach that God sanctifies His Church collectively and each of His children individually.

David went through tests and trials.

Likewise, Jesus went through tests and trials.

And, as Peter says, you will too, but rejoice in them because you are sharing in Christ's sufferings!

Jacob and Laban

As I mentioned above, David's test relates to the testing of Jacob when he was in Laban's house.

It is pretty clear that the author of 1 Samuel intentionally draws connections between these stories:

In both stories Jacob and David care for and protect the flocks of Laban and Nabal.

In both stories Laban and Nabal are ungrateful for the service that Jacob and David provide for them.

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

That's when Jacob finally leaves Laban's house and it is the time that David sets out to confront Nabal.

What's more, if you hadn't noticed by now, "Nabal" is "Laban" spelled backwards.

This is true in the Hebrew as well as in the English.

1 Samuel draws this connection between Jacob and David in order that reader might better understand each biblical account in light of each other.

David's Test

So what do we know of Jacob's test in Laban's house?

Jacob had to work patiently and diligently for a wicked man until God raised him up, restored him to his people, and reconciled him with his brother Esau.

Of course, this is very similar to David's struggle with Saul.

Like Jacob, God is calling David to patiently work under a wicked man until he is raised up, restored to his people, and (possibly) reconciled with Saul.

In other words, this whole episode provides another perspective on David's struggle with Saul.

The Facts

Here in verses 5-8, it looks as though David continues to persevere as he has done under Saul in 1 Samuel.

In these verses, David and his men help and protect Nabal's shepherds.

Nabal is very rich and he will be having a feast during the time of the Sheepshearers.

This would have been a normal time for a rich man to invite those in need to his feast.

David and his men had every right to think that Nabal would be generous to them.

Especially after they had cared for his flocks and shepherds.

But Nabal is a fool, and he will scorn David and his men.

Here is David's test, how will he respond to the fool?

How will he respond when he is scorned?

All of this occurs in our final section:

A Failed Response (vv. 9-13)

Here we see Nabal's response to David, and David's response to Nabal.

Nabal's Response

As mentioned Nabal responds to David's men with nothing but scorn.

Nabal ridiculously claims that he doesn't know who David is.

And accuses David and his men of being runaway slaves.

David's Response

When the young men come back to David with Nabal's response, David calls his men to arms.

David calls for 400 of his men to go with him to kill Nabal and every man in his house, while 200 men would stay behind with the luggage.

Nabal Returns Evil for Good

David's response here is "explainable" but it isn't "excusable".

It is easy to “explain” why David responded this way.

He was truly wrong and he had a right to some level of retribution.

However, David’s reaction is beyond what he had a right to.

Nabal returned evil to David’s good.

But now David sought to responds to evil with evil.

Returning Evil for Evil

There is perhaps never a scenario when you are more tempted to excuse your sin than when you are repaid evil for good.

Have you ever gone out of your way to do good to someone and found yourself repaid with evil?

This was the kind of test that David experienced and it is the kind of test that God places you in from time to time.

So now there is a question for you:

How do you respond when someone repays you evil for good?

Do you repay evil for evil?

As in all areas of our faith, we need to be led by Scripture.

And there is no shortage of biblical teaching on this account:

Jesus in Sermon on the Mount,

Matthew 5:44 *ESV*

⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

The Apostle Paul in [Romans 12](#),

Romans 12:14–21 *ESV*

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them....¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” ²⁰ To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

And the Apostle Peter in [1 Peter 3](#),

1 Peter 3:9–18 *ESV*

⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing...¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil. ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,

Turning the Other Cheek

All of this presents Jesus' teaching to "turn the other cheek."

But there is more to turning the cheek that you may be aware of.

For many people "turning the other cheek" just means being vaguely "nice"

In reality, "turning the other cheek" assumes that you have a right to some sort of retaliation.

In fact, that's exactly what the law teaches:

And eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

What this means is that if someone wrongs you, you are allowed to exact back from them to the same measure that they wronged you.

An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is a limit for what you can do when you are trying to exact justice.

The Law teaches that you have a right to this justice.

But Israel's consistent failure to properly keep the Law raises a question that Jesus presses in his teaching about turning the other cheek.

And the question is this: Can you meet out this justice perfectly?

If someone slaps you on the cheek you have the right to slap them on their cheek: Two slaps, theirs, and yours.

But what happens when you slap them back?

Will you slap them with the exact same force? Or will it simply descend into a spiral of retaliation?

Jesus teaches us to turn the other cheek, to forgive, to cover the sins of others with love, to take the pain of being sinned against rather than taking the slap that you have the right to.

In fact, this is what God in Christ has done for us.

In our sin against God we have slapped God.

Justice calls for two slaps.

But on the cross, God turned the other cheek.

In Christ, God bore the just retribution that was due to us.

And now, in Christ, we are given the opportunity to live in that kind of love toward one another.

Bearing with one another and forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven each one of you.

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