

Divine Interference

1 Samuel 25:4-35

When Oliver Cromwell became Lord Protector of England in 1653, it was common for portraits of monarchs to be painted in a way that flattered them by softening or removing any blemishes (like early airbrushing). But for Oliver Cromwell, there was no better way to distance himself from the vanity and self-indulgence of the monarchy than by having his likeness portrayed as accurate as possible.

So, when the painter, Peter Lely prepared to paint him, Cromwell was known to have said: "I desire you would use all your skill to paint your picture truly like me... 'warts and everything.'" It's believed that Cromwell's instructions to the painter is the origin of the common saying, "warts and all," which we use to express acceptance with the portrayal of ourselves or others as we really are without hiding our flaws or blemishes.

It's been noted that one of the evidences for the authenticity and reliability of the Bible is the way heroes of the faith are portrayed, namely, without hiding their flaws and failures. When running for political office, a shrewd campaign strategists works to paint their candidate in the best possible light. Conversely, especially in our day and age, they seek to paint their rival in the worst possible light.

But the divine author of the Bible does not attempt to win the approval of man by covering up the character flaws of the heroes of the faith. Rather, their great faith and flaws are recorded both as an **example** and as an **encouragement**. They serve as an example so that we can learn spiritual lessons from them, and as encouragement so that we would not mistakenly believe that God only uses perfect people, who, by the way, do not exist.

This morning, we will begin a series on the life of king David. Do you know, David is quoted more often in the New Testament than any other Old Testament believer and his biography is the longest of anyone else in the Old Testament? Although David played one of the most significant roles in the unfolding of God's redemptive plans, his

biography is far from flawless. The portrait that the word of God presents of David is given with warts and all—the good, the bad and the ugly. His life is an open book, a mirror that we are to look into and learn valuable lessons about ourselves so that we might be warned and encouraged in our journey of faith.

Main idea: God uses His humble servants to run interference and stop others from making a mess of their lives.

To unfold this theme, we are going to consider the responses of the 3 main characters in our text in a time of conflict.

1. Nabal's rebellious foolishness

First of all, let's take a look at **Nabal's rebellious foolishness**. While David was still on the run from King Saul and camping out in the wilderness, he comes into close proximity to a wealthy man named Nabal. Beginning in verse 4 we read:

“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.” (1 Samuel 25:4-8).

It's important to note here that in the times of David it was customary for a band of soldiers camping out in the fields under noble leadership to provide protection for shepherds and their flocks. In exchange for their protection, the owner of the flocks would compensate the soldiers and their leaders with provisions.

Knowing this custom, David sent ten of his young men to respectfully request to be given provision for their nourishment. David had the power to demand, threaten and intimidate Nabal, but instead he kindly instructed his men to make an appeal, and to convey that they protected Nabal's men, which they themselves could confirm.

But although the request for provision was respectfully given, it was not respectfully received. On the contrary, Nabal's response was laced with contempt, ridicule and insults. Nabal didn't respond that way because he was having a bad day. His response was characteristic of the kind of man that he was.

In addition to pointing out that Nabal was a wealthy man, verse three makes this contrast between Nabal and his wife Abigail: *"The woman was discerning and beautiful, but the man was harsh and badly behaved;"* (1 Samuel 25:3b). Later, when Abigail and David meet, she gives this description of her husband to David: *"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"* (1 Samuel 25:25).

When someone is insulted, an encouraging individual might say to that person, *consider the source*. In a sense, that's what Abigail is saying to David. She tells David that the reason he should not take Nabal's words to heart is because his actions are consistent with his name, which in Hebrew means fool.

Now in the bible a fool doesn't mean unintelligent. A fool is someone who says that there is no God or lives his life as if God does not exist. It's been said, many today who profess a belief in God live like practical atheists.

In contrast to a fool, a wise person is someone who fears God. And because they fear God—because they have a high and holy view of God they do not lean on their own understanding, but in all their ways they acknowledge God and yield to His direction for their lives (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Nabal the fool, on the other hand, lived for himself. He was ruled not by the will of God, but by His own emotions and selfish impulses (2 Timothy 3:1-4).

Now with the understanding of the kind of fool Nabal was, listen to how he responded to David's requests for provision: *"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?'"* (1 Samuel 25:10-11).

Notice that Nabal doesn't just refuse to give provision to David and his men for the protection they provided, which was customary. He belittles and insults David. David wasn't a fugitive fleeing his obligations to the King. Rather, he was the most loyal of the King's servants. But because of envy, King Saul was intent on killing David, which forced him to have to run for his life. Nabal didn't just dismiss David, he treated him like trash.

I was really challenged by Paul Tripp's observation here: "I would ask you this, as you face the harsh realities of life in a fallen world, as you face that boss who accuses you of something you didn't do, as you face that professor who seems intent on making your life hard, that roommate who seems so accusatory and so selfish, so hard to live with, a husband or wife who doesn't seem to care for you as much as you would expect your spouse to care, an extended family member who gossips about you behind your back. What happens inside of you? How do you respond? What do you think? What do you desire? When you're suddenly hit with the unexpected insult, unexpected trial, unexpected accusation, what do you do?"

Now hear this, you live in the human community, and [thus] you will be sinned against. David's story is your story. People don't always treat you with love. They don't always treat you with respect. They're not always happy to meet your needs. And I must say this; you are both victim and victimizer because you're not always loving to others, you're not always considering other needs. Sometimes your peace,

comfort, happiness, joy, pleasure, and satisfaction are much more important than the people around you. This is life in the real world.”

Now if you were David, if you were in line to be the king, if you had power and 600 loyal warriors by your side, how would you respond to Nabal’s insults? We are about to read David’s response, but before you go judging him, what would you do if you were in his shoes? The truth is we’ve all been in his shoes, albeit a few sizes smaller, and we have not responded in a God honoring way.

This leads us to our second point, David’s revengeful ferociousness.

2. David’s revengeful ferociousness

Keep in mind that David had shown great patience before when dealing with Saul, who was out to destroy him, but as we will see, Nabal got under David’s skin. Beginning in verse 13 we read: *“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”* (1 Samuel 25:13).

As he makes clear later in the chapter, the intentions behind David and his men strapping on their swords was not simply to put a little fear in Nabal. He was intent on taking him out and whoever else would stand in the way. David was enraged and, in his anger, had lost all control.

How did David go from demonstrating such patience, while on the run from Saul, to, in a fit of rage, wanting to take out a foolish man?

Before answering that question, remember that God didn’t hide this unbecoming moment in the life of David, who God called a man after His own heart. He didn’t hide it because He wants David’s life to serve as a mirror that we can look into and see ourselves—see what we are capable of if we don’t keep our eyes firmly fixed on God’s glory and grace.

Our judgement of David's response should not be, how could he even think of doing such a thing? Rather, we should be saying, "Apart from the grace of God that would be me." Paul Tripp puts it this way: "Listen, you are more like this man than unlike him. And as long as sin lives inside of us, brothers and sisters, we are susceptible to temptation. We are easily ensnared. This wasn't a declaration of war; this was a selfish insult and an unwillingness to provide, and David is immediately filled with murderous vengeance, and he's on his way to do something that would have been horrible. Don't sit there and let yourself think you can't relate. You've wanted evil for another person; you've wanted to see them hurt; in some way, you've cursed them in your heart-- we all have. And it comes so suddenly. You can be going along quite well, and the suddenness is shocking as the emotional temperature changes and now ruled, not by the call of God, ruled by passions and ruled by desires, you're out to do something that you shouldn't do. Maybe that's a burst of gossip, or a low-grade act of vengeance, or a word of insult, or a refusal to help. Listen, that problem is not first a problem of behavior; that problem was first a problem of the heart. It reveals how deep our continuing need is for God's grace. How evil and fickle our hearts are, and listen to this truth: temptation is all about forgetting, it's about forgetting who God is. You don't need to take vengeance; your God will take care of that. You don't need to panic in the face of lack of provision; your God is an ultimate Provider. You don't need to worry about your reputation; you have acceptance with the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. It's not just about forgetting who God is; it's about forgetting who you are. You are His covenant child. You're the object of His love. You're a sinner in need of His grace. How quickly we forget who God is and who we are. This is David as an amnesiac. He's forgotten his God; he's forgotten his identity; he's forgotten his calling, and he's on a mission of murder."

Now, you may or may have never been on a mission of murder, but Jesus said that we can, with our attitudes, murder someone in our hearts. There have been moments when we've all let a Nabal get under our skin and allowed our hearts to become bitter, resentful and even vengeful. In fact, I want to submit to you that we can be so shallow that it doesn't take a Nabal to make us bitter and resentful. It

merely takes someone walking past us without saying hello or someone cutting us off on the road to set us off.

Someone said, *Our true character is not our occasional or exceptional behavior. Our true character is our typical behavior.* Remember, Nabal's actions were consistent with who he was, a fool. David's reaction was uncharacteristic of who he was as a man after God's heart.

David knew God and because he knew God he experienced the restraint of the Spirit of God in his life. And when on occasion he resisted the Spirit and gave into his sinful impulses, God would work in other ways to run interference in his life. And when God in his grace ran interference, David repented. And if you know Christ as your Savior and Lord, the same will be true in your life.

What happened when David, in this ugly moment in his life, was about to act in a way he would later regret? God, in His grace, used Nabal's wife to run interference—to cause David to think twice about the fury he was about to unleash.

This brings us to our final point, Abigail's rescuing grace.

3. Abigail's rescuing faithfulness

As David and his men were marching toward Nabal and his camp, Abigail was advised of the situation. Beginning in verse 14 we read: *"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"* (1 Samuel 25:14-17).

Unlike her husband Nabal, Abigail was a woman of wisdom and a woman who was beautiful on the inside as well as on the outside. And because of her beautiful character and wisdom, one of the young men, who overheard Nabal's nasty reply and was aware of the repercussions, came to her with a word of warning. It's important to note that because of how mean spirited Nabal was, the young man went to Abigail and not Nabal; knowing how unapproachable he was. You couldn't talk to the man. He was self-centered and unreasonable.

Now after receiving the warning and knowing the urgency of the matter, Abigail goes right to work preparing an abundance of provision for David and his men who were fast approaching. After the provisions were loaded on donkeys, we read in verse 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"* (1 Samuel 25:19).

It's important to note here that she doesn't tell her husband about her plan not because she's working against his welfare, but because she's seeking to save his neck and the rest of her household.

As Chuck Swindol noted: "Sometimes a wife needs to act in favor of her husband and not say a word to him...and here's a classic case in point. For Abigail to approach her obstinate, foolish husband would have been instant suicide. He never would have let her send this stuff to David. So, she went ahead and did it on his behalf. I'm not saying she acted in secret against him. I'm saying she acted without his knowledge, yet in his favor. She ran interference for the man...and in doing so, she saved his life, literally."

Now as we will see, Abigail was not only running interference for the sake of her household, but for the sake of David's reputation. Abigail did not only send provision to David, she's is going to personally and humbly appeal to him so that he would repent of his murderous intentions.

And as she rides out to meet up with David, his anger is not subsiding. Rather, his blood pressure is rising and his rage is intensifying. As he's approaching the camp of Nabal, he says to his men in verse 21:

“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” (1 Samuel 25:21-22). David is seething with anger. And he’s so blinded by his anger, that he even invokes the name of God as he rehearses what he’s about to do to Nabal and his men.

When we are angry, it’s vital that we restrain our immediate response—or our impulsive reactions. Our immediate and impulsive reactions are almost always wrong.

But although David cast off all restraint, thankfully there was a person in close proximity, who with great wisdom, faith and courage, was willing to help him regain his self control.

As Paul Tripp also observed: “I’m reminded again as I read this passage that Your walk with God is a community project. You need the instrumentality of others in your life. You need their wisdom when you don’t have any. You need their courage when you don’t have any. You need their warning when you aren’t able to warn yourself. You need their strength when you are weak.”

Abigail sees David and his 400 hundred blood thirsty warriors fast approaching and rather than running the other way, she hurried off her donkey and falls at his feet. And with great wisdom and grace she makes her appeal. After asking for the guilt to be placed on her and admitting the folly of her husband, she continues with her God centered appeal in verse 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” (1 Samuel 25:26-31).*

Notice that repeatedly from verses 26-31, Abigail speaks God’s name. She reminds David, who had spiritual amnesia, of who God is and of the call of God upon David’s life. She clearly understood that God was using her to restrain David and to keep him from taking matters into his own hands. And the way that she is helping David to put the brakes on is by reminding him not only of who God is but of the promises of God. God will make David’s house sure. God will take care of David.

Furthermore, Abigail reminds him that His God is watching over him because he is fighting the battles of the Lord. David was called to fight the Lord’s battles, but Nabal is not one of them. In other words, the vengeance that he wants to exact is not his fight. It’s God’s fight. Abigail is saying, Don’t fight God’s fight. Give Nabal the fool to God and focus on the mission that God anointed you for, namely to be the prince and shepherd of Israel. Can I tell you, God can handle his business. Give it to God.

Nabal returned evil for good. But it wasn’t David’s responsibility to make him pay by returning evil for evil. It’s been said, there are three levels of life: The human level, the hellish level and the heavenly level. The human level, which David was resorting to, is returning evil for evil. The hellish level, like Nabal demonstrated, is returning evil for good. The heavenly level, which Abigail demonstrated, is to return good for evil. Abigail is telling David, you don’t need to take vengeance. You don’t need to work salvation with your own hands. God will see you through.

Now how did David, who had spiritual amnesia and was about to commit a great atrocity, respond to Abigail's appeal? Beginning in verse 32 we read: *"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" (1 Samuel 25:32-35).*

How many of you see that David didn't need to be rescued from Nabal, he needed to be rescued from himself. And God used Abigail to be the instrument of His rescuing grace.

As Paul Tripp so insightfully explains, "It's a God of grace, who by His grace, raises up instruments of grace that have the power to be used by the Spirit of grace to radically turn our hearts. God sends His servant to rescue David from David. I would ask you this: where, right here, right now, are you in need of that rescue? Where is temptation powerfully on you right now? Where are you tempted to forget who God is and who you are?"

You can't read this passage without hearing the familiar strains of the Gospel. God sent His Son, the Lord Jesus, on the ultimate mission of rescue, because our deepest, greatest problem could not be solved by us. We do not have the ability to escape the thing that holds us most powerfully and most deeply - our own sin. And so, God did a radical thing; He sent His one and only Son to take on human flesh, to suffer the ravages of life in a fallen world, to live a perfect life, to take on our sin in His death, to rise from the dead, conquering sin and death, so that, at our point of need, there would be rescue available to us. Listen, that rescue is not just your past forgiveness; that rescue is not just your future eternity; that rescue is for the here and now. There is grace for what you face."

Brothers and sisters, let's not take matters that belong to God into our own hands. Don't fight evil with evil. Don't seek vengeance or retaliation. God will take care of you.

Moreover, he wants to use you to be an Abigail in the life of others—in the life of people who are about to make a mess of their lives or have already made a mess of their lives. He wants you by the power of the Spirit to be an instrument of His rescuing grace.

Conclusion

How many of you know, we have too many Jezebels and not enough Abigail's in our world? Do you know what Jezebel was known for? She was famous for inciting her husband, king Ahab, to do evil—to take matters into his own hands—to fulfill the passions of his own heart at the expense of others. We have enough Jezebels in our world.

May God use us in His grace to be Abigail's—to be peacemakers—to run interference for Him and be instruments of His rescuing grace to the glory of His name.