

The Pursuit of Peace

1 Samuel 25

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INTRO:

If you have been attending North Center for any length of time, you know that we are currently going through the book of **Ephesians** during our Sunday morning gathering. We just finished **chpt 2**, and you may remember that one of the main themes of chapter two is how Christ made **peace** between people who were (at one time) rigidly opposed to each other (i.e., *between the Jews and the Gentiles*). Before we continue into **chapter 3** (*next week*), I want to take this Sunday to look a little deeper into this theme of peace. Not only does this theme show up nearly 400 times in the Bible (*meaning, it's a major theme throughout the Bible*), but it is also a major theme in the ministry of Jesus.¹

His birth was announced with a message of peace.

Glory to God in the highest, and **on earth peace** (εἰρήνη), goodwill toward men!

~ Luke 2:14

His sorrow before **the cross** was that the world was blinded to peace.

If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, **the things that make for your peace** (εἰρήνην)!

But now they are hidden from your eyes.

~ Luke 19:42

When He appeared to His disciples after **His resurrection**, His first word was “*peace*”.

Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, “**Peace** (εἰρήνη) **to you.**”

~ Luke 24:36

(John 20:19–21, 26)

The good news that we preach to a lost and dying world is “*the gospel of peace.*”

And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written:

“How beautiful are the feet of those who **preach the gospel of peace** (εἰρήνην),²

Who bring glad tidings of good things!”

~ Romans 10:15

The peace that we have **WITH GOD** is **divine gift** that we have not earned and that we do not in any way deserve. We have peace with God solely because Jesus purchased this peace for us through His death.

Yet, while our peace with God is a gift, the peace that we have with one another is a fruit of the Spirit (**Gal 5:22**) that we must cultivate. It is a work of God in which we must participate, or it won't happen. That is to say, true peace between people doesn't come naturally; we have to work at it. And it's hard work!

¹ And this is not counting the number of times the Bible speaks of similar themes (e.g., unity, reconciliation, oneness, togetherness, brotherly love, etc.).

² The NA28 doesn't include the word of peace.

Here, in this room this morning, we are literally surrounded by things that have the potential of dividing us. I have been the lead pastor of North Center for almost 3 years now, and the more I get to know about our church family, the more I am aware of just how many things we do **not** have in common! Let me offer just a few examples...

1. It's an election year. Come November, there are some in our church who are going to vote for a **Republican** candidate; there are some who are going to vote for a **Democrat** candidate; and there are some who (for conscience's sake) won't vote for any candidate.
2. During the Covid pandemic, there were some who believed very strongly in getting the **vaccination** and wearing **masks**, and there were those who believed equally as strongly against the vaccination and the masks.
3. In our midst this morning, we have some who hold to an **Armenian** theology of salvation, those who hold to a **Calvinist** theology of salvation, and those who couldn't care less about how people come to saving faith in Jesus.
4. We have **Premillennials**, **Amillennials**, and **Postmillennials** – which are three very different ways of thinking about the success of the gospel, the impact it is going to have on culture, and what the world will look like when King Jesus returns.
5. We have those who were raised **Baptist** their whole life, and we have those who don't really have any idea what it means to be a Baptist; they just like being part of this particular church family. And we have some who were raised in a denomination very different from Baptist.
6. We have some who make 6-figure **salaries**, and some who are barely scraping by week to week.
7. Some of you voted for me to step in as the **lead pastor**, but not all of you did. And I happen to know for a fact that if we could vote again today, some of you would change your vote – in both directions.
8. And that's **just the tip of the iceberg**. In this room today, we also have very different opinions about marriage, parenting, dating, education, government, politics, cultural engagement, financial stewardship, lifestyle choices, medicine, alcohol, church involvement, ecclesiology, sabbath rest, tithing, ministry philosophy, missionary engagement, worship liturgy, the Lord's Table, spiritual gifts, recreation, entertainment...
9. And we haven't even touched the differences represented in our ethnic backgrounds, sociocultural experiences, gender & generational differences...

And I could go on, but I think you probably get the point. We have an enemy who hates the peace that we have with one another in Christ. He hates it when brothers and sisters dwell together in unity (**Psa 133:1**), and so he seeks to divide us wherever, whenever, and however he can, and he never stops. And when you look at all of our differences, it would appear that the enemy has a lot to work with.

Here's our situation...

1. We are surrounded by people who are different than us.
2. We have an enemy who hates our unity...and would love nothing more than to use our diversity as a means of division.
3. Therefore, we have to work hard at living in peace with one another.

The message in **Ephesians 2** is that Jesus made a way for us to be at peace with one another; but that **doesn't mean** that *it comes naturally* or that *it's easy to maintain*. But if we're honest, I think we often have this notion that it **should** come easy. "We're all Christians after all..." and so we expect that Christian unity, brotherly love, gospel peace will just...happen.

But if you have been a Christian for longer than 2 minutes, you know that it just doesn't work that way. As fallen humans, it is **SO EASY** for our heart and mind and spirit to feel **irritated** or **hurt** or **offended** by other people – Christian or not. Being at peace with one another has never come easy, and it never will.³ We will have to continue to work at it together *every day of our life* until Jesus returns to take us home. So, the title of this message is, "**The Pursuit of Peace**". Of the hundreds of Scripture references dealing with this topic, here are a few NT examples that use this kind of intentionality language:

Therefore, let us **pursue the things which make for peace** (ειρήνης) and the things by which one may edify another.⁴
~ *Romans 14:19*

And **let the peace** (ειρήνη) **of God rule** in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.
~ *Colossians 3:15*

Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in **peace** (ειρήνην) by those who **make peace**.
~ *James 3:18*

Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him **seek peace** (ειρήνην) and **pursue it**.
~ *1 Peter 3:11*

If it is possible, as much as depends on you, **live peaceably** (ειρηνεύοντες) **with all men**.
~ *Romans 12:18*

If Jesus is going to find us living in peace with one another when He returns (*2 Peter 3:14*), it is going to require intentional effort on our part – every day of our lives.⁵

This morning, I want to take a few moments to consider some lessons on "**pursuing peace**" by looking at the story of a woman named **ABIGAIL (1 Samuel 25)**. We've been going through the book of 1 Samuel in our Wednesday Bible Study, and Abigail is just a beautiful example (in 1 Samuel) of what it looks like to pursue peace with the people that God has put into your life.

CONTEXT

David has been *chosen* by God and *anointed* as the king of Israel (*1 Sam 16*), even though Saul still occupies the throne. David and his motley crew of warriors have served and protected God's people in many different ways, including acting as guards for the shepherds of a man named Nabal. Nabal was an incredibly rich man who had many herds and many shepherds (*25:2-3*), and David had protected Nabal's herds and shepherds from the threat of attack (*which was very common in the ancient world*). **David had shown only kindness and care to this man (25:15-16)**. There came a day when David and his men were traveling near Nabal's home, and so David sent some of his men to humbly ask Nabal if he would give them

³ It takes intentionality to sing in harmony with another human being.

⁴ **Pursue peace** with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord (**Hebrews 12:14**).

⁵ Pursuing peace looks like humility, honesty, repentance, forgiveness, sacrifice, the work of sanctification, storing up God's Word in our hearts, prayer...

something to eat (25:8). It was a holy feast day, and David's crew didn't have anything to eat. His desire is for brotherly love & peace: "**Peace be to you, peace to your house, and peace to all that you have!**" (25:6).

And now here's where the **TENSION** in this story begins to build... Not only does Nabal refuse, but he reviles David's men (25:14)⁶ and then he belittles David himself – the warrior who was not only his Protector but also His God-ordained King. He responded to David's request as if David wasn't even worth the time of day: "*Who is David?*", he said (25:10). **His response is not only negative; it is wicked, and it is foolish** – which fits his name: "*Fool*" (25:25). David was his protector and his king, and Nabal just pushes him aside – as if he was of no value whatsoever. *If you're David, how would Nabal's response make you feel?*

This is just one of the gut-punches in this chapter. At the beginning of this chapter, we learn that David's friend Samuel has just recently died (25:1) – which is both a relational loss to David and also a political hardship because Samuel was the one who had anointed David as king – and he still isn't sitting on the throne, and then at the end of the chapter, we learn that Saul (the guy who is currently sitting on the throne) has given David's wife away to another man (25:44). **You talk about going through a rough patch.** And then here in the middle, this man who David has protected is treating him like a worthless nobody (25:10) while he shrieks insults at David's men, and something inside David breaks.

When David hears about Nabal's response, he's furious. The peace that he had initially desired... is gone! In his rage, he gathers about 400 of his soldiers (25:13), and he sets out to go slaughter every male in the Nabal's household. **David wants vengeance.**

Now David had said,
"Surely in vain I have protected all that his fellow has in the wilderness,
so that nothing was missed of all that belongs to him.
And he has repaid me evil for good.
May God do so, and more also, to the enemies of David,
if I leave one male of all who belong to him by morning light."
~ 1 Samuel 25:21–22

Now we could discuss whether David's anger in this situation was justified, but what we can say for sure is that his plan for revenge was NOT justified. In both the OT and the NT we hear God say, "*Vengeance is Mine. I will repay.*" (Deut 32:35; Rom 12:17–19).

But David isn't thinking about Deuteronomy 32:35. He's thinking about blood. So, he (*and 400 of his mighty warriors*) are on the war path, and every man connected to Nabal is about to be dead in a matter of hours... if it wasn't for someone who stood between them. And that someone was Abigail (*Nabal's wife*).

We are introduced to **Abigail** in *verse 3* as "*a woman of good understanding and beautiful appearance*" which is in stark contrast to the description of her husband Nabal who was "*harsh and evil in his doings*". Immediately after Nabal scorned David's messengers, one of workers tells Abigail about the situation, and somehow this worker knows that David means to harm Nabal and his entire household (25:17).

So, what does Abigail do? She immediately engages the situation with one objective: **pursue peace**. And the way that she pursues peace in this situation is both *a beautiful picture of the gospel* and an *example for all of us* in how to pursue peace in our own relationships.

There are lots of lessons that we can learn from Abigail in this story about the art of pursuing peace, but I just want to highlight five. She enters the situation...

⁶ This word, "revile (רָעַב)" means "to scream, shriek, scold, or to respond in anger".

1. **WITH IMMEDIATE & COURAGEOUS ENGAGEMENT:** She immediately & courageously engages the situation (25:18–20). *She doesn't ignore it. She doesn't run from it. She doesn't pass it off as somebody else's problem: "You started this; you fix it." She doesn't dial the 1-800-vent-your-frustrations-here hotline. She doesn't use her words as weapons. She doesn't seek to gain sympathy by gossiping about the situation with other people. She doesn't sit at home just hoping it will all eventually work itself out.* Her **immediate** response is to **courageously** engage the situation and pursue peace. The text says, "**Abigail made haste...**" (25:18, 34).
2. **WITH GENEROSITY & HUMILITY:** She enters the situation with a heart that is both generous & humble (25:18, 23, 27). We don't see her approaching her husband with a condescending "how could you," "how dare you", "what were you thinking" attitude. And as she comes to David, the posture of her heart is one of generosity and humility. She is seeking to diffuse the situation by coming – not with accusations or arguments or aggression – but with something beneficial to offer. She is entering this contentious situation – not with a desire to win...or a desire to take a side – but with a desire for peace. And when she sees David, the text says that "**she dismounted quickly from the donkey, fell on her face before David, and bowed down to the ground**" (25:23). That kind of attitude goes a long way in bringing peace into contentious situations.
3. **WITH HER EYES ON HER KING:** She is pursuing peace in this situation based on the character of her king alone (25:24–31). She isn't hoping that David and Nabal can just hash out their differences over a cup of tea. She isn't attempting to get them to see eye-to-eye or to find some kind of common ground. From her vantage point, there is no common ground:
 - David: "evil is not found in you" (25:28)
 - Nabal: his name means *fool*, and "so he is" (25:25)

So often, we seek to cultivate peace by looking for common ground – which is probably (at least partly) why there are over **45,000 different Christian denominations across the world**. We are pursuing Christian unity based on horizontal commonalities (*e.g., political persuasion, cultural continuity, ecclesiological convictions, stylist preferences, etc.*). The question is: is there any hope for rich, gospel peace in a church like North Center in which there is so much diversity on these horizontal things?

I think Abigail would say, "Yes." She seems to believe that there is hope for peace in her situation by focusing on the character of her king instead of the conflict in this situation. And, again, the posture of her heart is so beautiful: she's **not** looking for *common* ground; she's looking to get *on the ground* before her king and plead for a peace that only he can give. She's not looking for common ground. She's looking at her king – which is what united the church in Acts (4:32).

Brothers & sisters, we don't need to see eye-to-eye on the horizontals when we are both looking at our King, the Son of David, the Prince of Peace.

4. **WITH THE PROMISES OF GOD:** She engages this situation fully aware of what God has done in the past and what He has promised to do in the future, and this is where she steers the congregation.
 - *Look at how God has been with you in past situations like this* (25:26).
 - *Think about what God has promised to do for you in the future* (25:28).
 - Remember that your life is "*bound in the bundle of the living with the Lord your God*" (29).

This situation with Nabal is not a battle that you need to win, David. You already have all you need in the Lord your God. There's nothing to prove. Nothing to earn. No message you need to communicate. Your life is wrapped up in the Lord. Your worth is found in Him. Let people say what they will; you don't need to let a situation like this destroy the peace in your heart. *"Please, let not my lord regard this scoundrel, Nabal"* (25:25). You don't need to set the record straight, David. You don't need to defend your honor. You don't need to put Nabal in his place. *Who is Nabal compared to the Lord? And what is this problem compared to the promises of God over your life?* **A well-known Christian once said that he wouldn't cross the street to save his reputation.** Why? Because, when you know who you are in Christ, it just doesn't matter what the Nabal's of this world say about you.

- The Lord will do *"all the good that He has spoken concerning you"* (25:30).

Oh, how the promises of God can breathe life into an angry and vengeful heart! This doesn't make you indifferent in the midst of conflict. It makes you confident in the character and promises of God, and it gives you hope that He can handle this situation better than you ever could.

- And, in fact, that's exactly what happens in this story. David leaves this situation in the hands of God, and the story ends with God killing Nabal 10 days later (25:38).
5. **WITH NO REGRETS:** She pursues peace by seeking to help people respond in a way that they won't regret tomorrow morning – or 5 years from now. I think most of us can look back over our life at times when we have been hurt by somebody, and we responded in a way that we wish would take back. She pursues peace by telling David that *"it shall come to pass, when the Lord has done for my lord [you] according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and has appointed you ruler over Israel, that this will be no grief to you, nor offense of hear to my lord, either that you have shed blood without cause, or that my lord has avenged himself"* (25:30–31). In other words, if you surrender this situation into the sovereign, just, wise, and good hands of God, you won't live with the regret years down the road.

David listens to the council of this wise woman – who would eventually become his wife 😊

How does this story end? It ends with the peace that David wanted from the beginning (25:32–35).

Her counsel was wisdom for David in his situation, and they are wisdom for our church family today.

1. Don't run from conflict. By the grace of God, engage it with courage.
2. Seek to engage with a generous and humble spirit.
3. Keep your eyes on your King and on His character.
4. Cling to the promises of God.
5. As you engage, ask yourself, "How does this align with the calling of God on my life, and will I regret this tomorrow?"

And then trust that God is for you and not against you – and that He is able to do far more than you could ever think or imagine – for His glory and for the peace of His people.

PRAY

THE GOSPEL

1. The story starts with the king offering peace to a fool who rejects it.
2. The threat of death looms over the household of this man who sinned.
3. But someone (who was in no way involved in the trespass) entered into our collision course of sin and death and stood between a sinful people and our holy God.
4. Just as Abigail brought a peace offering of bread and wine (**25:18**); Jesus brought a peace offering of His broken body and His blood poured out.
5. Just as Abigail sought to bear the iniquity of this situation (**25:24**), Jesus took the iniquity of our sin and foolishness up on Himself.
6. And because of His sacrifice, we have peace with God.

If Jesus would do this for us, how can we not do this for one another... for His glory and for our joy.

This peace among believers is a key part of the Lord's Table (1 Cor 11).

Other NT Scripture Passages

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.
Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.
~ *John 14:27*

These things I have spoken to you, that *in Me you may have peace*.
In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.
~ *John 16:33*

The word which God sent to the children of Israel, **preaching peace** *through Jesus Christ*
—He is Lord of all—
~ *Acts 10:36*

For to be carnally minded is death, but to be *spiritually minded* is life and **peace**.
~ *Romans 8:6*

For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking,
but righteousness and **peace** and joy in the Holy Spirit.
~ *Romans 14:17*

God is not the author of confusion but of **peace**, as in all the churches of the saints.
~ *1 Corinthians 14:33*

Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, **live in peace**;
and **the God of love and peace** will be with you.
~ *2 Corinthians 13:11*

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, **peace**...
~ *Galatians 5:22*

And He came and **preached peace** to you who were afar off and to those who were near.
~ *Ephesians 2:17*

...endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of **peace**.
~ *Ephesians 4:3*

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving,
let your requests be made known to God;
and **the peace of God**, which surpasses all understanding,
will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.
~ *Philippians 4:6–7*

Esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. **Be at peace** *among yourselves*.
~ *1 Thessalonians 5:13*

Now may **the God of peace Himself** sanctify you completely;
and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved
blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
~ *1 Thessalonians 5:23*

Now may **the Lord of peace Himself** give you **peace** *always* in every way.

The Lord be with you all.

~ *2 Thessalonians 3:16*

Flee also youthful lusts;

but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

~ *2 Timothy 2:22*

Now may **the God of peace** who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead,
that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant...

~ *Hebrews 13:20*

Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, **be diligent to be found by Him in peace**, without
spot and blameless;

~ *2 Peter 3:14*

