



The Preventative Grace of God

1 Samuel 25:1-44

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At any moment, each one of us are a few bad decisions away from ruining our entire lives. I could this morning and it would take me less than five minutes to say or do something that would severely damage myself, my family, or some other image bearer, whether that be physically, emotionally, or otherwise. It seems obvious to some of us, but less obvious to others, that the capability for severe and irreversible evil lies incredibly close to all of our hearts. We are born with it, and over time it grows in its potency and potentiality. When we are children, the consequences of our decisions are seemingly as small as our vision of the world, but as we grow in responsibility, influence, and authority, the consequences of our actions also grow. And yet, while there is more at stake for a public leader than a private citizen publicly, before God we all stand in a similar space. The great enemy of our hearts is not our simple mistakes or bad decisions, it is sin against a Holy God. And the consequences of sin may differ in real time, but in eternity they carry the same weight: separation from the joy and presence of the creator.

So while we should rightly fear the reality that our public lives could be ruined by an act of adultery or fraud or by a slow build up of individual vices, the real fear we all sit with today is that everyday the great pit and chasm of sin looms large. The consequences are eternal. Will we stumble and fall in? And if so, will our lives be ruined forever?

David walked a precarious path along the outskirts of sinfulness as well, in his journey to become king. Sometimes he stumbled, other times he stood firm. Last week we saw his virtue on full display, as he handed out mercy instead of vengeance, a picture of David's trust in God's hand to protect him and guide him even when the easy way out of his troubles was an arms length away.

But the hits keep coming for David, and we find him today in a similar situation with a different antagonist, but still fighting against his own sin. Pushed the brink, David nearly commits a terrible act of unsanctioned genocide against someone of his own clan. But miraculously, God stayed his hand. David did not go the murderous way of Saul, but his hand was on his sword. What prevented him from falling into the trap of sin and making that one decision which would ruin his life forever? It was only the grace of God.

Today we will examine with care the three characters of our text. In Nabal, we will see the consequences of unrestrained sin. In David, we will find the preventative grace of God, and in Abigail, we will find the instrument of mercy. But here is the truth that we must take comfort in in 1



Samuel 25. At every moment, God's sovereign grace is holding back the tide of sin and evil, and it is his providence that chooses the time and place to release the tide and bring it back in. But if we are safe in Jesus Christ, the great mercy of God, he will never let the tide sweep us away.

Nabal: The Consequences of Unrestrained Sin

We start in verse 1 with a sad subscript. Samuel, the prophet of God, has finally passed. Since his announcement of rejection as Saul as king, we have not heard much from Samuel. But here we recognize his importance in God's plan: all of Israel assembled and mourned for him. It also sets the stage for us: David has lost his main source of guidance, his mentor. His time in the wilderness has just gotten much darker.

Verse 2 introduces us to Nabal, but it doesn't start with his name. Instead, it starts with his wealth. Later in verse 17, Nabal is described as "worthless", and so it is affirmed here. He is worthless, so the first description we have of him are his material wealth and also the contrast between him and his wife Abigail in verse 3. Notice Abigail is "beautiful" and Nabal "badly behaved", Abigail "discerning" and Nabal "harsh". They are not a good fit. The mention of his heritage is both an indication of his value: "Caleb" sounds very similar to "dog", but also a reminder that as a Calebite, he is of the house of Judah, in some way kin to David.

He is overseeing the shearing of his sheep, and David hears about it. David is a shepherd, and so he is used to the festival that accompanies the shearing time: a time of rejoicing over the "harvest" of the wool. So he sends his men to make a request of Nabal's generosity. Notice verse 5 he tells them to use his name. And verse 6 his men pronounce "peace", shalom, they desire the flourishing of Nabal. And their actions back their words, because in verse 7 we hear of how they have protected the sheep and shepherds of Nabal. It would be normal for a rich man like Nabal to show generosity to those who had provided him a service on a feast day. He was very wealthy, he had enough. He could feed David's men for acting as his bodyguards. This is their only request.

But what is Nabal's response? First, he mocks David's name. In this chapter Nabal is portrayed as standing in the place of Saul, so he uses the name for David that Saul uses: "Son of Jesse". Notice too in verse 10 he pays no attention to David's might or honor-he treats him simply as a runaway slave. His insecurity is showing, he is about to make a big mistake.

I want you to notice verse 11. Nabal is known, by his servants and his wife, as a worthless foolish man. And when he opens his mouth, it is not hard to see why. Nabal's main sin is not just greed or gluttony or lack of hospitality. Like Saul, he had no fear of God. "My bread", "my water", "my meat", he says, failing to attribute any of his wealth or success to David, but most of all failing to acknowledge that any of his possessions come from God. Nabal has no room in his heart for worship, and he therefore has no room in his heart for generosity or kindness.



This is what it means to be a fool. It's not just to make poor decisions, it's not just to lack common sense. Psalm 14 describes the fool well in verse 1: "The fool says in his heart 'there is no God.'" This is not atheism, it's agnosticism. It's a lack of fear and awe and trembling before the holiness of God.

Sadly enough, in our world we barter in foolishness. The most tragic and foolish mistake any one can ever make is to fail to acknowledge the holiness of God. This is our original sin: Adam had no fear of God. Ultimately this root leads to terribly rotten fruit. Notice in verse 17 Nabal's own servant says of him: he is such a worthless fellow, no one can speak to him. He is unapproachable, and his foolishness goes before him. He is a ticking time bomb, and this seemingly small decision is what sets him off. In failing to worship and fear God, we teeter dangerously close to the edge of falling into a pit we cannot get out of. It's only by God's grace that Nabal's life has been sustained to this point, but he can't see it. He is blind to the fact that although he appears outwardly successful, he is heading headlong into destruction.

In the life of Nabal we have a sobering reminder. Most of the world is in Nabal's shoes. Blind to the holiness of God, their hearts are darkened and they have tricked themselves into thinking everything is fine. But in reality they are flirting with destruction, and it's only the grace of God that holds them from destruction. Such were we, in our sin!

And eventually, God's grace is married to his justice, and his patience meets its end. We see Nabal in verse 36, feasting like a king. He fancies himself safe and powerful, but little does he know the mistake he has made. God doesn't need David to finish him off, just the news of David. Once Abigail tells him how close he was to killing off his entire house and line, Nabal suffers some sort of stroke or heart attack. His heart is stone, and he dies 10 days later, verse 38 telling us that it was the Lord who struck Nabal. His sins caught up to him. Friends, what I want you to see this morning is that we are not far from the foolishness of Nabal. Romans 1:21 gives us a picture into our state apart from Christ:

Although we knew God, we neither glorified him as God or gave thanks to him, but we became futile in our thinking, and our foolish hearts were darkened.

Without the grace of God entering in our hearts, our hearts of stone never turn to flesh. Instead, they remain stone, destroying us in the process.

Do you ever wonder why God seems silent in the face of evil? It is not because he has forgotten offenses against him. It is because he is patient, desiring that all reach repentance. But he is a just God, and the end of his waiting is coming. This reality of sin is part of the gospel, its the dark backdrop that causes the diamond of grace to shine brighter. But before we get to good news, we must consider the consequences of our foolishness. This world is passing away. And as we will see through David, we are closer to the place of Nabal, the place of foolishness, the place of destruction, than we think.



David: The Preventative Grace of God

David's response to Nabal in verses 12-13 show us a picture of a man who has had enough. Three time in one sentence in verse 13 the operative word of David's response is repeated: sword. Violence is on his mind.

Put yourself in David's shoes. He has been chased and chased by Saul, forced into the wilderness. Already he has offered help to Keshites, who turned him in, and to the Ziphites, who betrayed him. Not only this, he has even spared Saul's own life when he could have easily ended him! And now, he has been giving Nabal nothing but kindness. All he asks is for a bit of food on a day of feasting from an extremely wealthy man, and again he is rejected. He has had enough, we see his plan and frustration in verse 21-22.

What is significant about David's plan of retribution? It is strikingly similar to Saul's response when he committed all the priests and city of Nob to death. He is steps away from becoming the very man who seeks his life. In David's cry you can almost hear the psalmist Asaph in Psalm 73 when he laments: "All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence!". So his response is violence that is in direction opposition to God. Nabal, for all his foolishness, is David's kinsman. David has no right to lay a hand on him. To do so, would be as Abigail says in verse 31, David "shedding blood without cause" and "working salvation himself".

Too often this is the pain of the Christian. We strike hard against our sin, only to see it coming hard right back. We think that addiction to pornography has been defeated, only for it to reappear at the worst time possible. We work hard in prayer and pain against our spiritual depression, only to see it seem to grow stronger, not weaker. We fight for years towards reconciliation to a friend, only to have them reject us more completely at the last moment. So we say with David: "I've had enough." What is the point of trying anymore?

And now we are dangerously close to foolishness. We are mistaking holiness as a means to an end of our own making, not a response to right fear of the Lord. We are blinded by frustration, by weariness, by anger, and we strap on our sword to do battle against fellow image bearers, shedding blood without cause or working salvation by our own means, stepping closer and closer to the edge of the cliff of destruction.

But God is in the business of holding us up. David was saved at the last minute from the gruesomeness of his own sin. When the smoke clears, he realizes this, and the text points us to this reality. Abigail says it in **verse 26**—"the Lord has restrained you from bloodguilt". David says it in **verse 34**: "God has restrained me from hurting you," and again in **verse 39**, God has "kept back his servant from wrongdoing". The only reason we do not dive headfirst into sin continually is the grace of God working our hearts to restrain evil by the Holy Spirit.



David had a plan for evil, but God frustrates our best laid plans when they derive from our own sinfulness. Consider when you fail that God is showing mercy to you, keeping you from evil and sin. All along, his grace not only forgives sin for his people, but also prevents it from having its way in the first place. What grace, that all our plans for evil can easily and readily be frustrated by the God who holds all things in his hand!

This line of thinking is incredible in it's scope, because what it does for us it causes us to marvel at the grace of God. What sin might he had prevented in me today that kept me from destruction, that I am completely unaware of?! Oh the mysteries of God, that he would hold back evil like a great spiritual dam, only letting in what is necessary for the growth and flushing of his church, until the day when he can release it all and deal with it finally. It's that kind of awe that can spark revival. Consider how Edwards expressed it in his most famous sermon, the one which led to the First Great Awakening.

Sin is the ruin and misery of the soul; it is destructive in its nature; and if God should leave it without restraint, there would need nothing else to make the soul perfectly miserable. The corruption of the heart of man is immoderate and boundless in its fury; and while wicked men live here, it is like fire pent up by God's restraints, whereas if it were let loose, it would set on fire the course of nature; and as the heart is now a sink of sin, so, if sin was not restrained, it would immediately turn the soul into fiery oven, or a furnace of fire and brimstone.

The good news in all this is that there is purpose to God's restraint. For David, his purpose is clear: David will not be a king like Saul. He will not ascend to the throne via trail of blood, he will not enact his own vengeance or his own ways. But David gets to that end only by the grace of God holding back his own sin and filling him up with the grace to see it. David's response to Abigail's rebuke is telling in **verse 32**. Nabal cannot receive rebuke, but those filled with the Holy Spirit can. Rebuke is often the way that God prevents sin in us. And after rebuke, David blesses God and Abigail.

See, God is not caught off guard by the evil of the world. He allows sin at times, and he restrains it. He sends the viruses and sends the relief. This does not make us less responsible: he are still agents of rebellion in our sin, but when we truly see that he alone holds the keys to the dam that lets it in and restrains evil from the world, it causes worship. He is glorified for being the architect of a plan of redemption that ultimately brings him the most glory and us the most joy in worshipping a God who is glorious! This is why David's response of joy and blessing and praise is appropriate—both when he recognizes God's restraint of his own evil, *and* in **verse 39**, when he sees how God avenges him in destroying Nabal.

For us, our purpose is also clear. We find a picture of it in the verse we read earlier in our worship: 1 Corinthians 10:



No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

What this text is not teaching is simply that God sets two paths before you: one to sin, and one to not, and that ultimately you are the determiner of your life. No, what we see in 1 Samuel is that it is God alone who brings restraint from sin. What this text is teaching us is that when we are tempted to sin, and even when we fall into temptation, God will still keep us. Even if the way out of temptation is not immediately clear, he is providing it, he is keeping you, as he kept David. Not so that you can be king, but so that you can be Christ's. God is always working in the life of the believer, even in the midst of sin and temptation, to bring you not to destruction and death but to eternal life.

The question we turn to now is *how*? How does God prevent us from sin and provide a way of escape from death and foolishness? How does God make sure his children end up like David and not like Nabal, that their sin doesn't consume them and turn their hearts ultimately to stone? The answer is this: he does it through an intercessor, and instrument of mercy that awakens our hearts away from foolishness and into the wisdom of God.

Abigail: God's Instrument of Mercy

Let me summarize the character of Abigail like this. There are many pictures of Jesus in the Old Testament., but here in this Godly woman, I think we find one of the clearest. But we have to be ready to see it.

Verses 14-17, the servants of Nabal come to Abigail instead of Nabal. They know they can trust here. She is approachable, where Nabal is not. When the threat is at its greatest, they come to her for help. She is their champion, she is the one who will stand in the gap for them. In this sense she is acting in a priestly way.

Abigail knows exactly what to do, and **verse 18** says she makes haste. **19-20** she prepares food for David, an offering of guilt, and does not tell her husband. She is in charge, she will bring the offering from her own supply. Notice too she rides down on a donkey, a signifier of the future king to come. In her wisdom and cunning she is regal—her men follow her command above her husbands, a rare and incredible sight in this cultural setting.

When she meets David, she bows before him. Again and again she calls him lord, a signifier of her humility before not only David, but David's anointing. She knows she is facing the future king, and she is not too proud to admit it. In **verse 24** she herself takes the guilt of Nabal, who does not deserve it. She not only brings a sacrifice and peace offering of food, she is willing to be the sacrifice herself if David will spare the men of her house. **Verse 28**, she pleads and intercedes for her house and her sons, and she acts in a way like a prophetess, calling on David not to spare her



because she is worthy, but because God has promised David the throne, and he has no need to prove himself with bloodshed. **Verse 29**, she prophesies that David's enemies will be slung out of a sling, just as David defeated his first enemy with a sling.

In **verse 31**, she calls upon the future grace of God for David. Because God sent her to stay his hand, David will have no future "cause of grief or pangs of conscience". In other words, he will not bear this sin with him the rest of his life. God, says Abigail, is protecting you through me—head his warning and you will not have to bear the guilt of this act any longer. Accept this offering, and your guilt will be cleared. Notice too that Abigail is Nabal's savior too, he experiences the common grace of being spared the slaughter of his household. She is upheld as the savior not because she points to herself (mentioned in her speech once), but to God and his promises (mentioned seven times). What Abigail effectively does is bring David back to God. And when David's heart turns, she lives as his servant, **verse 41**, washing the feet of him and his men. She deserves all the honor, but instead she lowers herself to be a servant.

Abigail is God's instrument of mercy and salvation for David. She is the tool by which God restrains the sin of David and keeps him in his grace. With her wisdom, she turns David's foolishness back to wisdom. Notice Abigail is described as "beautiful." No doubt she had outward beauty, but it was her wisdom, courage, humility, and desire for peace that makes her truly beautiful. And so it is with the plans of God. The ways of God are always more beautiful than our vengeful ones. Earlier in 1 Samuel David is called "beautiful", but here he has lost touch with the beauty of trusting God. He needs the beauty of God present in Abigail to awaken his heart again.

Friends, Abigail is a picture for us of the work of Jesus Christ. He comes to us in humility before his Father, making intercession for us, pleading with God for us. Riding on a donkey, he comes as a king to be our peace offering before God. He is our priest, standing in the gap for us. He is our prophet reminding us of the promises of God. He came not to be served, but to serve, the washer of our feet and the cleanser of our sin. And although we may not see him in all his glory now, he is beautiful and wise. And when we lower our defenses and see the folly of our sin, the beauty of Christ awakens us again to the beauty of God. The only reason our sin does not continually consume us is because God has graciously elected to show us his unmatched beauty and glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

But Jesus, of course, is better than Abigail. Jesus Christ is both the interceding instrument of mercy and the perfect king who needs no intercession. Although Abigail saved David from sin this time, in God's plan it was not her place to save him from every sin. Notice his sin in **verses 43-44**. Remember that this is an entryway into the pit that plagued David and his sons: the sin of unrestrained lust and power. See, David was a flawed piece in God's plan. And God doesn't require us to be king over his people. Instead, he gives us a King who never succumbed to the pit of sin, who faced the temptation of Satan himself and did not give in, who took on all the sin of the world onto his shoulders and put it to death by rising again. Our king Jesus is the only one capable of bearing our guilt fully and completely, because he was guiltless. Instead of seeking vengeance by the sword, he died at the hands of his accusers. Because of Jesus, we can rejoice when God saves



us from the act of sinning, and rejoice that even when we do sin, it is not outside of his control and he has provided true righteousness in Jesus.

Through the death of Jesus Christ, God exercises his authority over sin. In one sense, he lets it loose. It was a great act of evil that the Son of God was crucified as a sinner, the greatest evil the world has ever seen. But in another sense, like we find in 1 Samuel 25, God is restraining sin. He is restraining all the eternal effects of evil and sin for his people. If you are in Christ by faith, you will not see destruction. God has provided a way of escape, and he has prevented the consequences of your foolishness from reaching you. And he has done it, he has pushed back forever the tide of sin and death, by placing all the weight of that sin on Jesus Christ. God released the full force of your sin on his son. He opened up the dam, his patience ran out, and his wrath did not fall on you and will not fall on you if you are in Christ. That, my friends, is the gospel of Jesus Christ at it's heart. The blood of Jesus Christ continually calls out in Heaven, he lives always to make intercession for you! Right now he pleads your case, his once for all work eternally absorbing the consequences of your sin and turning your heart of stone into a heart of flesh forever.

When you walk out these doors, you walk into a world full of evil and sin. But Christian, God is providentially keeping you. He is restraining the evil that would consume you, and he does it by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Making you his own, he is slowly building you into the image of his Son. When you are tempted, God is with you. When you give in to sin, God is with you. He will not abandon you to destruction, because you are in the grip of his son, and no sin or temptation or evil can snatch you out of his hands.

