

The Blessings of a Wise Wife

1 Samuel 25:1–44

Key Verse: 25:32-33

“David said to Abigail, “Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. ³³ May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands.”

A Professor from Arizona State University did a study in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Among their experiments they showed half a group of men pictures of 16 beautiful women and the other half they showed 16 abstract art slides. Those who viewed the pictures of the women rated their girlfriends or wives less attractive and expressed less commitment to their relationships with them than those who viewed pictures of the art. What the researchers discovered is now known as the contrast effect. And this contrast effect can be seen most clearly in the marriages of Hollywood actors which seem to dissolve almost over night. Take for example the mating career of Tom Cruise which illustrates this perfectly. Mimi Rogers (his first wife) was six years *older* than him (he was 24 at the time). Nicole Kidman, his next wife, was five years *younger* than him. Penelope Cruz, his next long-term girlfriend, was *12 years* younger than him. And Katie Holmes, his current wife, is *16 years* younger than him. I'm guessing his next wife will be one of the Olsen twins, who are 24 years younger than him. The researchers think that this contrast effect may explain why Hollywood actors are notorious for their short, unstable marriages and relationships. (1) That is their theory but I believe that through this passage we will see something that will help ensure a lasting marriage.

Chapter 25 starts out with a major announcement that seems so understated. Take a look at verse 1a. “Now Samuel died, and all Israel assembled and mourned for him; and they buried him at his home in Ramah.” Not only was Samuel one of Israel’s greatest leaders, since the time of Joshua and Moses, but his death marks a transition in Israel’s history from a time of being led by divinely appointed spirit filled judges to royal dynasties. And even though Samuel had given up the day to day duties of running the nation to Saul, the old prophet-judge didn’t lay down his life until Saul publicly acknowledged David’s right to the throne. And Saul does this at the end of chapter 24. And its as if Samuel says, “My work here is done,” and he passes away and they bury him in his home town of Ramah.

David flees into the desert of Maon, which by the way has another name that we might be more familiar with Paran, where Ishmael lived (Ge21:21) and it’s where Israel received their wilderness training. (Nu 10:12) This was not part of Israel and not a safe area. And he happens to end up near where a man named Nabal is pasturing his sheep and goats. Nabal was a wealthy man having 3K sheep and 1K goats. However the consequences of being a wealthy man meant that it took a lot of land to feed all those sheep and goats. And in order to save money and do it cheaply, Nabal moved his flock outside of the king’s protection which was an unwise move because of all the raiders in the area. If you remember in the previous chapter, the Philistines carried off all the livestock of the people of Keilah. So Nabal having his flock in that area was a calculated risk that he was taking.

Now David being the kind of guy he is, he sees what's going on and he camps his army near by their herds. At this point Nabal's men could have been nervous seeing 600 armed fighting men, with their families and others setting up camp right next door wondering what is going to happen to them. And to their surprise, instead of helping themselves to the sheep and goats to make some tasty gyros, David's men become like a wall around them protecting the flocks from all the bandits. Basically David was acting like a good neighbor to Nabal's men. And he was living out what Paul wrote to the Galatians, "as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." (Gal 6:10) And as a result Nabal's property didn't suffer the expected loss of doing business in that region and his gain was increased. So because of David, Nabal prospered. This is the kind of influence that believers should have in our communities, families and work. Our presence should be a source of benefit and blessing to those around us. As David's men were "very good" to Nabal's household, people who know us, at work or around the neighborhood, should also consider us a blessing to be around.

David did this all the while he himself was in considerable need. His service to the Lord required support from God's people, and with hundreds of mouths to feed every day David needed a lot of supplies and aid. So David sent 10 delegates to greet Nabal and ask for a donation. David was considerate when he sent only 10 men, he could have come with his whole army and then it would be more threatening but he kept it light so as not to make Nabal uncomfortable. And just as David's neighborliness provides a model for us, so also does his gracious approach in seeking aid. In Verse 5a-6 David says, "Go up to Nabal at Carmel and greet him in my name. ⁶ Say to him: 'Long life to you! Good health to you and your household! And good health to all that is yours!'"

In David we don't find any envy of Nabal's prosperity or any grudge toward his abundance, but only the wish that he be blessed. (2) They continued to their point, "Now I hear that it is sheep-shearing time. When your shepherds were with us, we did not mistreat them, and the whole time they were at Carmel nothing of theirs was missing. ⁸ Ask your own servants and they will tell you. Therefore be favorable toward my young men, since we come at a festive time. Please give your servants and your son David whatever you can find for them." (v7-8) David's request was very humble, even calling himself, "your son David." It was reasonable, and even culturally expected, that the owner of the flock should reward its protectors. David shouldn't have had to ask, Nabal should have offered.

David must have sent his men with expectations of a friendly and generous response, after all he was not dealing with his enemies but his own Israelites, even fellow Judahites and Nabal came from the clan of Caleb (who was noted in Israel's history for godliness and faith). Given David's treatment of Nabal's shepherds, the respectfulness of his manner, and the timing of his request (sheep shearing time), David probably hoped for something good to eat that night. But what he got in return was hostility. Nabal had riches and a good family name but he lacked character. He is described as surly and mean. (v3) Surly is defined as unfriendly, hostile, menacingly irritable, dark and threatening.(3) Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days." (v10) Not only does Nabal refuse David's request he adds insult to injury and rips into him with insults. The least Nabal could do was say, "I'm sorry, I don't have anything to offer," he didn't have to go out of

his way to insult David. Instead Nabal taunted David, as if he didn't know who David was. He knew who he was, he even knew his father's name. He talked down to David and implied that he was nothing more than a run away servant. It was the time of good fortune and happiness when people were inclined to share with others, like Christmas time. So Nabal should have given something.

Nabal was to money, what Saul was to power. Nabal appears to be defined by his money and he was not about to give any of it away even though he had plenty to spare. He was corrupted to such an extent that his own name meant "fool." I read from one commentator that Nabal's name doesn't have the same meaning for fool that we know, rather it implies viciousness, atheism and materialism. (4) And we may wonder if David had Nabal in mind when he wrote Psalm 14:1 "The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good." What led Nabal to be so foolish and greedy? The answer is in verse 11. "Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where?" The words "I" and "my" occur so frequently as if he did everything. This reminds me of Jesus' parable about the rich young fool in Luke 12. Both were rich and called fools and they speak with the same mannerisms. The young fool wanted to tear down his barns because he had such an abundant harvest and build bigger ones and then I will take life easy eating and drinking and being happy. However God responded, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" ²¹ "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God." (Lk 12:20-21) The reason for this kind of greed come from the root of idolatry. Paul said that it is not merely the idolatry of worshiping money but the idolatry of worshiping self. (col 3:5) In contrast to Nabal, while we want to be prudent in the use of money, we should be willing and joyful in helping those in times of need. Psalm 37:21 instructs us, "The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously;"

David's men returned and made sure that they told him every word and his response is short and terrifying if you happened to be Nabal. "David said to his men, "Put on your swords!" So they put on their swords, and David put on his. About four hundred men went up with David, while two hundred stayed with the supplies." (v13) It is interesting to note how David handles this situation compared to when he met Saul in the cave. David was graceful when confronting one who he acknowledged was the "Lord's anointed" but he acted differently toward Nabal who was an arrogant fool. David's ungodly response comes right after his success in sparing king Saul. We tend to respond to spiritual success by relying on ourselves and loosening our dependence on God's grace through prayer and His word. Thus David could restrain himself in the cave but now he was unrestrained and transformed into just another Saul. (5) If David was to be the king the Lord wanted he would have to act consistently no matter who was before him. He even became a little proud because he expected to receive a certain amount of respect on just account of his name.

It's clear that David was not acting in a godly way so God intervenes and thus we are introduced to Abigail. Actually Abigail was introduced in verse 3 and described as "an intelligent and beautiful woman" and this godly woman's wisdom and shining character stands in stark contrast to her husband. Nabal was a fool, but she was intelligent. He was proud and she was humble. She was approachable and reliable and no one could talk to him. Others respected her but he was held

in contempt. And finally she was a godly woman who feared the Lord while Nabal worshiped material things more than God. Her marriage was not “for better or worse,” but “from bad to worse.” It tells a lot about a family when the servant went to Abigail when a life and death situation arose. And the seriousness of the matter can be seen in the fact that the servant, risks his life when he openly calls out Nabal as a wicked man that no one could talk to. Men like Nabal rarely know how much they owe to the faithfulness of their wives. (6)

Abigail wastes no time and acts decisively. “She took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, five seahs of roasted grain, a hundred cakes of raisins and two hundred cakes of pressed figs, and loaded them on donkeys.”¹⁹ Then she told her servants, “Go on ahead; I’ll follow you.” But she did not tell her husband Nabal.” Now some might question Abigail’s submissiveness given the fact that she goes behind her husband’s back. But being submissive doesn’t mean being stupid. If she brought this up to her husband they probably would have gotten into a fruitless argument and the delay might have cost them their lives. When God made the first woman for Adam, God wanted a suitable helper for him. (Ge 2:18) And she was more than a suitable helper to Nabal because she saved her husband’s life. She acted very courageously. She took action that was directly opposed to her husband’s decision and this was dangerous because she lived in a time when the husband had the right of life and death over his family. Maybe she took the supplies that were supposed to be for Nabal’s celebration. Not only that, she faced an angry enemy face to face alone without any protection.

Abigail’s actions and speech display the full depth of her discernment and inner beauty so that we can learn from her appeal to David in five distinct ways. First Abigail humbled herself in David’s presence. “When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David with her face to the ground.” (v23) Our culture despises those who lower themselves before a foe. We like strong men, warriors. But in God’s kingdom, humbleness is a mark of grace. Secondly Abigail confessed the guilt of her sin. “She fell at his feet and said: “My lord, let the blame be on me alone. Please let your servant speak to you; hear what your servant has to say.” (v24) We might object that it was Nabal’s sin not Abigail’s but as his wife she owned the sin of her husband and acknowledged it before David. They were one before God. She was not sorry that David was angered but that her husband had offended. Thirdly, Abigail offered restitution for the wrong done to David. David had been denied rightful provision, (Dt 24:15) So Abigail brought the food supplies to give him. “And let this gift, which your servant has brought to my master, be given to the men who follow you.” (v27) And equally important, Nabal publically disgraced David, she publically praises him. “Please forgive your servant’s offense, for the LORD will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my master, because he fights the LORD’s battles. Let no wrongdoing be found in you as long as you live.” (v28) I think that she was inspired by the Holy Spirit because she knew things that others may not have. In the new testament, it is clear that confessions of sin should be accompanied by sincere attempts to correct the wrong doings. As in the case of Zacchaeus in Luke 19. Fourthly, Abigail pled for forgiveness asking David to “Please forgive your servant’s offense.” It was only after she had humbly approached David, confessed the sin of her house and made a sincere attempt to correct the wrong that she pled for forgiveness. And lastly she appealed to David’s sense of godliness. When we have wronged others, we should appeal to them to respond in a godly way but only after we have sincerely confessed and repented for our own sins.

With her skillful words, Abigail turned David's heart from his murderous rage, so that he accepted her gift and replied with words of peace. God's grace was with David so that he was not only willing to forgive but he even repented of his own foolish and ungodly plans. Abigail is so good that she not only saves her husband but keep David from sinning against God. And she helps David to learn that ungodly vows should be repented of instead of stubbornly kept.

The reason I believe that Abigail is such a good example of the blessings of a wise wife is that she has a Christ like character. Her actions remind us of Jesus. Jesus came into our midst in a humble way. Paul writes that Jesus made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant being born in the likeness of men. (Php 2:7) And Jesus, who was innocent, takes the sins of the world and bears them before God. (Isa 53:6) Jesus made an offering, he offered to God what was due to him from us, namely a perfect life of obedience to the law. Jesus fulfilled all righteousness on our behalf and presents it to God. (Ro 5:19) And finally, Jesus seeks our justification by holding the covenant promises of God. (Heb 8:12) Jesus Christ saved us from the just wrath of the holy God just as Abigail saved Nabal from the sinful wrath of David's anger, however she still she couldn't save him from God's wrath.

David seeing this realizes what is going on and he praises God. Can we read verses 32-33. "David said to Abigail, "Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. ³³ May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands." And just as David praised God for sending Abigail we can praise God for sending Jesus to save us. (John 3:16)

It has been said that a good wife is worth her weight in gold. Now I don't know if that is true, but I am willing to bet that she is even more valuable than that. Proverbs 31 says that they are more valuable than rubies and I believe it. It also says that Husbands have full confidence in her and he lacks nothing. She brings him good, not harm. She works hard taking care of her family. And funny enough, given our weather this past week, Proverbs 31 says that when it snows, she has not fear, even if it is like our thundersnow. I think the reason those Hollywood marriages do not last is because they do not value the right things. They value things like outward appearances and how popular or successful someone is rather than seeing the true value and beauty a person has, namely a godly character. David saw the value of a godly wife and after Nabal died, he went and took Abigail as his wife. So to the men here today, I want to say, if you have a godly wife, value her, love her and treat her with the respect she deserves for she may save you in the future. And to the women, be like Abigail. Learn from her and follow in her godly ways in dealing with family issues. And to all of us let us thank God for sending Jesus who diverted the wrath of God to himself so that we might have life. Let us follow Abigail's example and live like Jesus.

Footnotes

- (1) <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-scientific-fundamentalist/200909/why-hollywood-marriages-don-t-last>
- (2) William G. Blaikie, Expository Lectures on the Book of First Samuel (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground, 1887, reprint 2005), 383.
- (3) According to dictionary.com
- (4) Daniel M. Doriani, David the Anointed (Great Commission Publications, 1984), 63.
- (5) Rev. Richard Phillips, Insult and Injury (<http://media.sermonaudio.com/mediapdf/37101527504.pdf>), 408
- (6) Gordon J. Keddie, Dawn of a Kingdom: The Message of 1 Samuel (Hertfordshire, UK: Evangelical Press, 1988), 235.