

You Kept Me from Bloodguilt
1 Samuel 25
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Introduction

When I was in high school, my brother and I played on my youth group's basketball team that was part of a church league in our area. All of the games were played at Pilgrim Lutheran Church. The night that we played Pilgrim Lutheran's youth group team, our stands were full of fans and it started out as a great game for us. We were making shots and pulled out ahead. That's when the "phantom fouls" started getting called. The referee, who we found out later was on staff at Pilgrim Lutheran Church, started calling fouls on our best player, Brian, that began to elicit negative reactions from our fans. By the end of the third quarter, enough of those questionable calls had been made that our fans started yelling and booing about what they felt was biased officiating trying to help the home team catch up. It got so bad that the ref walked over to our fans and warned them that he would call a technical foul if they were being too loud. At which point, my dad, who was one of the pastors of our church, but also had been a ref in his younger years, yelled back, "You can't call a technical foul on fans!" "Sir, you need to leave the gym!" I wasn't sure whether to be proud or embarrassed of my dad at that point, but it was a very tense moment.

He left the gym and I found out later that he started pacing up and down the hallway and decided that he would wait on the ref after the game to have a "discussion," and if need be, get his point across non-verbally. My dad grew up in the projects of Pittsburgh and a bit of his upbringing was rearing its head. Thankfully, Buck Oliphant, one of the other dads and pastors at our church sensed what was happening and found my dad in the hallway. "It's not worth it, you need to calm down, you can't hit anyone." Reason and non-violence prevailed, and no one was confronted or assaulted that night. I don't remember if we won or not, but I always thank God for Buck and his role as a peacemaker that kept my dad from doing something that he would have regretted.

In this morning's passage, we will see another tense situation, but one with much higher stakes than a basketball game and a fistfight. It involved the future king of Israel, who was living in exile at the time, a wealthy businessman, and his lovely wife. God used one of them as a peacemaker who intervened and spoke words of reason and good will to the angry, offended party. May we both strive to listen to the peacemakers in our lives and to be used by God as peacemakers in the lives of those around us. The first section sets up the conflict, as we see the truth of

I. Proverbs 18:6 - A Fool's Lips Bring Strife (vv. 1-13)

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.

When we meet Nabal in this narrative, we first learn about his wealth and how many animals he owned before we even learn his name; an indication that that was the most important part of his identity. Nabal's name literally means "foolish, senseless... with the (insinuation) of ignoble or disgraceful."¹ The writer points out the contrast between him and his wife in verse 3: "*the woman was discerning and beautiful, but the man was harsh and badly behaved.*" (That sounds like how my wife and I might get described.) The wisdom literature of the Bible always contrasts fools with the wise, so this story will illustrate those differences well. Three other characters in the story will agree with the narrator's assessment of Nabal's character and call him worthless, foolish, or evil. We'll see he had quite a combination of traits – demanding, deceptive, and rude.

David sent ten men to Nabal to ask him for food for his small army. He made sure that they mentioned how they *didn't* harm any of Nabal's shepherds. One way to look at this is that it's a shakedown, like criminals/the mafia who ask legitimate businesses to give them a cut of their profits for "protection money." But another way to see it is that David and his men were noble outlaws who brought a level of law and order to the area that benefited businessmen like Nabal. The custom at the time was for landowners to set aside a portion of the profits that they made to share with anyone who helped them,² and David did not think that it was out of the question to be shown a little tangible gratitude for that. As we'll see later on, he was not exaggerating how much he helped Nabal's shepherds; if anything, he was being modest.

Nabal basically replies: "What's so special about David? Rebellious young men around here are a dime a dozen these days. He's basically a runaway slave looking to eat and drink what I set aside for my men. Tell him to get lost." It's one thing to refuse to feed David and his men, it's another thing to pile on the insults. It's not that Nabal didn't know who David was, he called him the "son of Jesse." Nabal probably knew roughly the size of David's small army, which had grown to 600 men by this point. On the one hand, that's a huge group to feed; on the other hand, that's a huge group to anger and make an enemy of. The real problem is that Nabal is a greedy, selfish man who refuses to help those in need. He used first-person pronouns "I" and "me" eight times in verse 11 alone!

David took no time to ponder his response to this affront, he just quickly mobilized his men, taking two-thirds of them with him to attack Nabal. Things would have gotten very ugly without an intermediary. In the next eighteen verses, we'll see the truth of

II. Proverbs 15:1 - A Gentle Answer Turns Away Wrath (vv. 14-31)

¹⁴ 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

¹ P. Kyle McCarter, *1 Samuel* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), p. 396.

² Charles Swindoll, *David: A Man of Passion and Dignity* (Dallas: Word, 1997), p. 95.

our master and against all his house, and he is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him.”
18 Then Abigail made haste and took two hundred loaves and two skins of wine and five sheep already prepared and five seahs of parched grain and a hundred clusters of raisins and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on donkeys. 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. 20 And as she rode on the donkey and came down under cover of the mountain, behold, David and his men came down toward her, and she met them. 21 Now David had said, “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.” 23 When Abigail saw David, she hurried and got down from the donkey and fell before David on her face and bowed to the ground. 24 She fell at his feet and said, “On me alone, my lord, be the guilt. Please let your servant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your servant. 25 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. But I your servant did not see the young men of my lord, whom you sent. 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.”

David’s decision to wipe out all the men in Nabal’s house has to be seen in contrast to the chapters before and after it that we studied last week where he could have killed Saul but resisted. David’s mercy towards Saul was a defining feature, but now rather than talking other people out of violence, David needed to be talked out of his anger. Though he seemed at times to be the model of patience and self-restraint, he was far too quickly brought to a murderous rage on this day. He was in danger of becoming Saul, bringing death and destruction to an entire group of people, as Saul had done in Nob. What a stark reminder that all human beings are prone to terrible sins.

Providentially for Nabal, one person in his household saw David’s angry reaction to Nabal’s refusal and knew he was on his way with murder in his heart: one of the young men, one of the shepherds of Nabal’s flock. He knew enough about the family dynamics to know that Abigail was the intelligent, rational one in the house, so he came to her, not to his master. He testified that David and his men had been a great help to Nabal’s business, that they were “a wall” protecting them from anyone wanting to harm them. The fact that he felt free to call her husband a “*worthless man that one cannot speak to*” seems to indicate that he knew that Abigail would agree with that, or at least not get angry at him saying that. Later she called her husband a “*worthless fellow*,” so her opinion of her husband was as low as everyone else’s.

And so Abigail went to head off David in person with a large gift of bread, wine, meat, and fruit. She had no way of knowing how David would accept her pleas for mercy; she had no guarantee that he would see reason and relent; he could have killed her on the spot. But whereas Nabal had treated David as a runaway slave, Abigail treated him as her king. She called herself “*your servant*” and called him “*my lord*” fourteen times. You might see that as just flattering him, but her speech made

it clear that she knew that he would be the next king, and it also served as a subtle reminder to him to live up to that high calling. Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of Abigail's message to David is: "Please, please, please, don't do this. This isn't an action worthy of a prince of Israel. Remember who you are. Remember God's anointing, God's mercy. Don't stoop to fighting grudge battles; your task is to fight the battles of the Lord... Nabal is a fool, don't you also become a fool."³ She pointed out to David in verses 28-31 that he would rise to the throne of Israel and that he could trust God to deliver him from all of his enemies. She used a curious image of how the Lord would protect David: "*the lives of your enemies he shall sling out as from the hollow of a sling.*" What does that remind you of? David's slinging a stone to kill Goliath, right? Abigail subtly reminded David of his past deliverance by the hand of the Lord to encourage his trust in the future.

The last thirteen verses illustrate

III. Proverbs 13:15 - Good Sense Wins Favor But the Way of the Treacherous Is Their Ruin (vv. 32-44)

³² 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." ³⁶ And Abigail came to Nabal, and behold, he was holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king. And Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunk. So she told him nothing at all until the morning light. ³⁷ In the morning, when the wine had gone out of Nabal, his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him, and he became as a stone. ³⁸ And about ten days later the Lord struck Nabal, and he died. ³⁹ When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Blessed be the Lord who has avenged the insult I received at the hand of Nabal, and has kept back his servant from wrongdoing. The Lord has returned the evil of Nabal on his own head." Then David sent and spoke to Abigail, to take her as his wife. ⁴⁰ When the servants of David came to Abigail at Carmel, they said to her, "David has sent us to you to take you to him as his wife." ⁴¹ And she rose and bowed with her face to the ground and said, "Behold, your handmaid is a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord." ⁴² And Abigail hurried and rose and mounted a donkey, and her five young women attended her. She followed the messengers of David and became his wife. ⁴³ David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel, and both of them became his wives. ⁴⁴ Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Palti the son of Laish, who was of Gallim.

David went very quickly from being ready to destroy an entire household of people to praising God and this woman. You can sense his relief in being restrained, quickly realizing that the Lord had worked things out so that he did not sin and become responsible for an atrocity that he would have haunted him. In verse 33, David said, "*Blessed be your discretion*" for Abigail keeping him from bloodguilt. Discretion is good judgment. Proverbs 11:22 says, "*Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion.*" In other words, "a beautiful woman's attractiveness is negated if this quality is absent. But Abigail (was) both wise and beautiful."⁴

David bid her go in peace; he has been won over to her cause. Abigail went back to her husband, who has had a big feast and gotten drunk. This man who was so stingy with David earlier has held a feast that the narrator notes was "*like the feast of a king,*" it's a picture of excess, waste, and

³ Eugene H. Peterson, *Leap Over a Wall: Earthly Spirituality for Everyday Christians* (New York: HarperOne, 1997), p. 84.

⁴ Robert B. Chisholm Jr, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2013), p. 167.

selfishness. In the morning, Abigail told him everything, and his hangover turned into what sounds like a coma, with his heart giving out. Apparently, he stayed alive for another week and a half before the Lord took his life for good. Here is a reminder that when we leave judgment to the hands of God, He will vindicate His people and judge His enemies. Rarely does it happen as quickly as it did to Nabal but knowing that God will one day make all things right frees us from having to take vengeance into our own hands. Psalm 37:8-9 summarizes what David learned in this passage: *“Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil. For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.”* Every part of those verses was proved true in this narrative.

The wrap-up of the story, and probably the reason that it was told, is that David proposed to Abigail, and she accepted. Which sounds romantic until you remember he’s already married and he added a third wife soon after. Remember, the Bible does not always condemn or approve conduct in its narrative; it faithfully records historical events. Yet, the foundation of marriage was laid down at creation – one man and one woman. Polygamy is not a godly way to live, and it was a snare that the kings of Israel fell into at their own peril.

Conclusion

So, what are a couple of takeaways we could apply from this sermon?

- The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach?
- When two men have stubbornly made a mess of things, it takes a woman to put things right?
- If you are a wise, godly woman married to a fool, you can still act righteously?
- You never know how a guy might appreciate your kindness, you might be invited to become his third wife? (OK, definitely not that last one!)

If we drill down in one area that our man, David, needed to work on, it would be how we deal with our anger. Let’s grab a few Scripture passages to guide us in our application as we work:

Proverbs 14:29 – *“Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.”*

1 Corinthians 6:7 – *“To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?”*

Ephesians 4:26-27 – *“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.”*

- 1 – When we feel anger, we should examine our lives for what else has us upset or emotionally vulnerable. David may have still been reeling from Samuel’s death, and the strain of leading and feeding 600 men most likely made him vulnerable to reacting poorly to Nabal’s insults. Where in your life are you feeling threatened, depressed, or vulnerable that make you angry over very little?
- 2 – When we feel anger, we should ask ourselves, “What idol in my heart is being threatened here?” Anger arises when our desires are blocked, and it’s often an easy way to discover what our idols are. David’s idol was the desire to be shown respect, and his anger flared when it did not happen.
- 3 - We need to realize that anger is a choice that easily becomes a habit. We don’t have to give in to our anger, we can choose to deal with it in a constructive, godly way or just let it take over and wreak havoc. We need to think about our actions in light of long-term vision for our lives, not short-term emotion. Abigail’s main message to David was that when he became king, he did not want blood on his hands. His short-term plan was just to vent his anger, but his long-term hope was that he would be a godly, just king, and his wiping out an entire household would have hurt that. In the same way, rash actions you do can greatly hurt your life for years to come.
- 4 – We need to be open to voices of wisdom urging peace and de-escalation. Wise counselors might be communicating the will of God to us, as David acknowledged that Abigail spoke God’s message to

him. I've heard it said this way: "Get curious not furious." There's always another perspective that is worth hearing and considering.

5 – If we allow ourselves to be wronged, to suffer without getting revenge, we can rest in the knowledge that God will make things right in the end, as He did with taking Nabal's life. It's not up to you to right every wrong, sometimes you turn the other cheek and leave justice and vengeance to the Lord.

Now, those things are putting us in the place of David in the story, but what about when we find ourselves in the role that Abigail played in this story? Not the exact position of defending a foolish spouse against a murderous outlaw, but the idea that God might want to use us in peacemaking. Will you be available to be courageous, humble, and generous in that role? You've probably heard St. Francis of Assisi's prayer: "Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon..." That's a good prayer. But there's always a huge risk there – one side, or sometimes both sides, might turn on you. You risk their wrath for trying to bring them together, for trying to speak reason and peace. But James 3:16-18 reminds us that Christians who have received God's grace in their lives will be compelled to sow peace: *"¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."*

Lastly, we see a glimpse of the gospel in this story, where someone came between an angry king and a wicked man. Every analogy breaks down at a certain point, so we are not pressing the details here, but the outline of the story gives us insight into how Abigail's actions foreshadow the ministry of Jesus. I'll let Richard Phillips take it from here:

"Like Abigail, Jesus came into our midst in a humble manner... taking on the form of a servant... Then, like innocent Abigail taking the guilt of Nabal's sin onto herself, Jesus took up our sins to bear them before God... Jesus fulfilled all righteousness on our behalf, and presents his righteousness to God as the obedience owed by us; by way of analogy, Abigail presented David with the provisions owed to him by Nabal, satisfying the demands of justice so as to avert his wrath. Finally, as Abigail appealed for forgiveness and directed David to a godly response, Jesus speaks to us of the cleansing of our sins and then calls us to a sanctified life... As Abigail saved Nabal from the sinful wrath of David's anger, Jesus Christ has saved us from the just wrath of the holy God."⁵

We've spent a little bit of time talking about what happens when we're David or Abigail in this story, but what we need to realize is that, by nature, we are Nabal. We are foolish, wicked, selfish, and have offended the King with our sin. And judgment is coming whether we know it or not, and more often than not, we have our feet up on the table having feasted and drunken ourselves into a stupor. Don't choose to be Nabal at the end of his life – you have been handed the pardon for your sin. Embrace Jesus' mediatorial work on your behalf and live in peace with the King. Amen.

Benediction - Jude 24-25 – *"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of His glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."*

⁵ Richard D. Phillips, *1 Samuel* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2012), pp. 433-34.