

“RESTRAINING GRACE”

1 Samuel 25:1-44

Before we jump into our text tonight, we need to make sure we have a firm grasp of the context. In chapter 24, the narrative revolved around a scene that developed at a cave near En Gedi (close to the Dead Sea). Saul and his men had basically cornered David and his 600-man army. Saul went into a cave to “*relieve himself*.” Unbeknown to him, David and his men were hiding out in the back of that same cave! Some of David’s troops urged him to kill King Saul while he had a chance. The man after God’s own heart refused to lay a hand on “*on the Lord’s anointed*.” The two men went their separate ways.

1. THE INTRODUCTION

“Then Samuel died...” Here is a reminder of the brevity of life. Such an important spiritual figure has right here in verse 1 a short, insignificant obituary. J.C. Ryle said the following about the time when a spiritual leader steps out of the scene . . .

Fear not church of Christ when ministers die, and saints are taken away. Christ can ever maintain His own cause. He will raise up better servants and brighter stars. The stars are all in His right hand. Leave off all anxious thought about the future. Cease to be cast down by the measures of statesmen, or the plots of wolves in sheep’s clothing. Christ will ever provide for his own church. Christ will take care that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. All is going well, though our eyes may not see it. The kingdoms of this world shall yet become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ.

David and his men moved west from the Dead Sea area across the rugged mountains into the Desert of Paran. They settled near the home of a man named **Nabal who lived in Maon**. While they were in the area, David and his men protected Nabal’s flocks and servants from predatory thugs.

Ray Pritchard made the following comment about the cast of characters that is involved in this narrative . . .

The story of David and Nabal and Abigail is riveting. It's got it all. There is intrigue, injustice, conflict, anger, revenge, attempted murder, an impassioned plea, sudden death, and unexpected romance. All in the same chapter! It's like an episode of Baywatch or All My Children, except that this story is entirely true.

1 Samuel 25:1–8... **1** Then Samuel died; and all Israel gathered together and mourned for him, and buried him at his house in Ramah. And David arose and went down to the wilderness of Paran. **2** Now *there* was a man in Maon whose business was in Carmel; and the man was very rich, and he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. And it came about while he was shearing his sheep in Carmel **3** (now the man's name was Nabal, and his wife's name was Abigail. And the woman was intelligent and beautiful in appearance, but the man was harsh and evil in *his* dealings, and he was a Calebite), **4** that 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, visit Nabal and greet him in my name; **6** and thus you shall say, 'Have a long life, peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have. **7** 'Now I have heard that you have shearers; now your shepherds have been with us and we have not insulted them, nor have they missed anything all the days 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 have come on a festive day. Please give whatever you find at hand to your servants and to your son David.' "

Nabal— This man was a fool as his name implies. He was greedy and mean and selfish to the core.

Abigail— The wife of Nabal was an intelligent, wise, and beautiful young lady. This was without a doubt a mismatched couple. Keep in mind that in this time period the marriages were arranged by the parents. That certainly explains this situation.

This story is riveted against the backdrop of a *“festive sheep-shearing occasion.”* It was the culmination of months of hard work, and there was even an unwritten law of hospitality where the owner would give gifts to those who helped to protect the servants and the flocks. David and his men served as protectors for Nabal’s shepherds and this sheep. Therefore, he sent 10 of his men to greet Nabal and to receive the customary gift for the protection they provided.

2. THE INDISCRETION

Here’s the point in the story where Nabal acted like a fool. Pay close attention to the insult he leveled at the man anointed by God to be the next king of Israel.

1 Samuel 25:9–11... When David’s young men came, they spoke to Nabal according to all these words in David’s name; then they waited. **10** But Nabal answered David’s servants and said, “Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants today who are each breaking away from his master. **11** “Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men whose origin I do not know?”

Nabal made two huge mistakes. First, he refused to show kindness to David and his men. Second, he insulted David and his father Jesse. Listen to this Proverb . . .

Proverbs 20:2... The terror of a king is like the growling of a lion; He who provokes him to anger forfeits his own life.

That brings us to what I’d like to call . . .

3. THE INDIGNATION

To say that David got hot under the collar would not be strong enough. Let these words sink in . . .

1 Samuel 25:12–17. . . . So David’s young men retraced their way and went back; and they came and told him according to all these words. **13** David said to his men, “Each of you gird on his sword.” So each man girded on his sword. And David also girded on his sword, and about four hundred men went up behind David while two hundred stayed with the baggage. **14** But one of the young men

told Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying, "Behold, David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet our master, and he scorned them. **15** "Yet the men were very good to us, and we were not insulted, nor did we miss anything as long as we went about with them, while we were in the fields. **16** "They were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the time we were with them tending the sheep. **17** "Now therefore, know and consider what you should do, for evil is plotted against our master and against all his household; and he is such a worthless man that no one can speak to him."

David's fiery anger would have led to massive pools of blood and a dark stain on his life. Not only was he intending to kill Nabal, but he was also intending to kill every male associated with him (**21-22**). When you place this situation side-by-side with David's refusal to kill King Saul in the cave of En Gedi, it just seems so incongruent.

- **Nabal was foolish a nobody in the grand scheme of things.**
- **King Saul was dead set on killing David.**
- **David trusted God to take vengeance in Saul's case.**
- **In Nabal's case, David was willing to take matters into his own hands.**

Let's look closely at Abigail's actions. She prepares a generous gift of food and rides out to meet David. She doesn't send a servant or send a message. She goes herself. Abigail's personal involvement in resolving the dispute shows us the importance of being a peacemaker. Ray Pritchard's comment deserves our attention . . .

Knowing that David's men were hot, tired, and hungry, she whips up a meal for 400 angry men. The feast includes bread, wine, lamb, grain, raisins and figs. It was an early version of Meals on Wheels. She intends to intercept David's men, feed them, and talk David out of killing her husband.

As the narrative continues, we come to critical juncture. I call it . . .

4. THE INTERVENTION

As we continue to examine Abigail's actions, we see another important aspect. She doesn't just act with uncommon wisdom; she also acts quickly. She doesn't delay or procrastinate. Her quick response demonstrates the importance of timely action in resolving conflict. I want you to see how God used this dear lady to restrain evil in David's life.

1 Samuel 25:18–22... Then Abigail hurried and took two hundred *loaves* of bread and two jugs of wine and five sheep already prepared and five measures of roasted grain and a hundred clusters of raisins and two hundred cakes of figs, and loaded *them* on donkeys. **19** She said to her young men, “Go on before me; behold, I am coming after you.” But she did not tell her husband Nabal. **20** It came about as she was riding on her donkey and coming down by the hidden part of the mountain, that behold, David and his men were coming down toward her; so she met them. **21** Now David had said, “Surely in vain I have guarded all that this *man* has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him; and he has returned me evil for good. **22** “May God do so to the enemies of David, and more also, if by morning I leave *as much as* one male of any who belong to him.”

This scene is a great case study in defusing a highly explosive conflict. Abigail's humility and bold faith shine through like the noonday sun. She says, “**It's my fault—blame me.**” None of it was her fault.

1 Samuel 25:23–25... When Abigail saw David, she hurried and dismounted from her donkey, and fell on her face before David and bowed herself to the ground. **24** She fell at his feet and said, “*On me alone, my lord, be the blame.* And please let your maidservant speak to you, and listen to the words of your maidservant. **25** “Please do not let my lord pay attention to this worthless man, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name and folly is with him; but I your maidservant did not see the young men of my lord whom you sent.

Abigail dips into her bucket of spiritual wisdom and pulls out three reasons why David should reconsider this plan . . .

#1 GOD SENT ME TO RESTRAIN YOU FROM EVIL.

1 Samuel 25:26-28... “Now therefore, my lord, as the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, since the LORD has restrained you from shedding blood, and from avenging yourself by your own hand, now then let your enemies and those who seek evil against my lord, be as Nabal. **27** “Now let this gift which your maidservant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who accompany my lord. **28** “Please forgive the transgression of your maidservant; for the LORD will certainly make for my lord an enduring house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the LORD, and evil will not be found in you all your days.

#2 GOD WILL TAKE VENGEANCE ON THE EVIL ONE.

1 Samuel 25:29... “Should anyone rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, then the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living with the LORD your God; but the lives of your enemies He will sling out as from the hollow of a sling.

Once again, Ray Pritchard’s words are worthy of our attention . . .

David, God himself has protected you and will protect you. You can afford to show kindness to Nabal. When she mentions “the pocket of a sling,” there is a clear reference to the day David defeated Goliath with one stone from a sling. It’s a subtle way of saying, “If you rely on the Lord to fight your battles, you will win every time.”

#3 YOU WON’T REGRET THIS CHANGE OF MIND.

1 Samuel 25:30-31... “And when the LORD does for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and appoints you ruler over Israel, **31** this will not cause grief or a troubled heart to my lord, both by having shed blood without cause and by my lord having avenged himself. When the LORD deals well with my lord, then remember your maidservant.”

Abigail reminds David that one day he will see that Nabal’s insult was a relatively small matter. It sure wasn’t worth the stain that mass murder would leave on his

heart and soul. In light of David's destiny, he couldn't afford to obsess about getting even with a man whose name meant, "*a fool*."

Here's a principle we've got to remember. Revenge might feel good now but it will feel bad later. *You can't win by trying to get even*. So many relationships could be healed if only we would stop and think before we act or speak.

HAVE YOU EVER SAID OR DONE SOMETHING IN ANGER THAT YOU WISH YOU COULD TAKE BACK?

Abigail nailed it. The results of her actions and the soundness of her wisdom proved to be amazingly accurate and super beneficial to David . . .

1 Samuel 25:32–38... Then David said to Abigail, "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me, **33** and blessed be your discernment, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodshed and from avenging myself by my own hand. **34** "Nevertheless, as the LORD God of Israel lives, who has restrained me from harming you, unless you had come quickly to meet me, surely there would not have been left to Nabal until the morning light *as much as* one male." **35** So David received from her hand what she had brought him and said to her, "Go up to your house in peace. See, I have listened to you and granted your request." **36** Then 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 did not tell him anything at all until the morning light. **37** But in the morning, when the wine had gone out of Nabal, his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him so that he became *as a stone*. **38** About ten days later, *the LORD struck Nabal and he died*.

In this narrative, we've seen . . .

- **The Introduction**
- **The Instigation**
- **The Indignation**
- **The Intervention**

Finally, I want you to see the end of the story . . .

5. The Invitation

1 Samuel 25:39–44... When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, “Blessed be the LORD, who has pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal and has kept back His servant from evil. The LORD has also returned the evildoing of Nabal on his own head.” Then David sent a proposal to Abigail, to take her as his wife. **40** When the servants of David came to Abigail at Carmel, they spoke to her, saying, “David has sent us to you to take you as his wife.” **41** She arose and bowed with her face to the ground and said, “Behold, your maidservant is a maid to wash the feet of my lord’s servants.” **42** Then Abigail quickly arose, and rode on a donkey, with her five maidens who attended her; and she followed the messengers of David and became his wife. **43** David had also taken Ahinoam of Jezreel, and they both became his wives. **44** Now Saul had given Michal his daughter, David’s wife, to Palti the son of Laish, who was from Gallim.

God restrained evil in the heart of a man after God’s own heart—*a man who would become the greatest of Israel’s kings!* He used a godly woman who convinced an angry man to wait for God to do his work.