



JOY IN THE PRESENCE OF A FOOL

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

Catalog No. 965
1 Samuel 25:32-44
Eighteenth Message
Brian Morgan
October 9, 1994

In our studies in the life of David we have been learning that the wilderness is the learning ground for spiritual formation. One thing that makes the journey particularly difficult is that we are in unfamiliar territory and we have neither guide nor map to direct us. Situations that we once took for granted become insurmountable problems. The old ways of operating no longer apply; we are forced to make choices by trial and error. For David, this involved trying to survive the angry attacks of the demonic despot Saul, and overcoming the daily challenge of finding food to feed his band of four hundred men.

In our last study, we saw that David fled to the wilderness of Paran, a vast, semi-arid region stretching between Judah and the Sinai. In that place David was relatively free from Saul's insane pursuit. There David could be of service to his countrymen, protecting their flocks from marauding desert tribes. Perhaps he would fall into the good graces of a generous landowner who would repay him with hospitality and food for his services. But Nabal, the owner whose flocks he cared for, was a fool. He greeted with contempt David's request for support, treating the men who came to him as a band of renegade terrorists. His response so enraged David that he and his men armed themselves and set off on their personal holy war. David's knee-jerk reaction seemed inconsequential to him. He regarded Nabal and his household as Philistines and enemies of Yahweh.

But David's plan to shed innocent blood would have destroyed his future had not God intervened in the matter by sending a woman, Abigail, whose godly character and discernment qualified her to be the intermediary between two angry men. Last week we looked at the skill she displayed in this role. Today we will learn the outcome of her actions in the reception she receives first, from David, then, from her husband, and finally, from the Lord.

From David she receives blessings.

I. Blessings from the King (25:32-35)

Then David said to Abigail, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me, 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. 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." So David received from her hand what she had brought him, and he said to her, "Go up to your house in peace. See, I have listened to you and granted your request (lit. "lifted up your countenance")." (NASB)

David responds to Abigail's intervention with the threefold blessing: "Blessed be the Lord who sent you ...Blessed be your discretion...Blessed be you." Recognizing that God had intervened in sending Abigail to him, David begins by blessing the Lord; then he blesses Abigail's character, displayed in her discretion and diplomatic skill that so gently disarmed his anger. What a ministry this would be in our day where there is much anger manifest all around us. We need Abigails who will disarm the time bombs of anger that are ready to explode at any moment.

Finally, David blesses Abigail. She recognized the hand of God in this matter between her husband and David, and she did not wait to act. Had it not been for her, David would have killed Nabal and destroyed his own future in the process. She had helped him avoid a calamity.

Then David vents his last residue of anger. "His rage still vibrates fully in the conditional mood" (Fokkelman). He admits he is still in the cooling down mode: "Unless you had come," he said to Abigail, "there would not have been left to Nabal until the morning light [as much as] one male" (literally: "he who urinates against the wall").

Finally, David accepts Abigail's well-timed gift, and grants her request. He sends her home in peace, having "lifted up her countenance." This a hint that more joy is in store for her. Abigail, the peacemaker, is given a well deserved blessing by the king. A later King in Israel would say, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (a title for the Messianic King). Jesus was saying that servants like Abigail perform the royal work of kings. Jimmy Carter did just such a service a few weeks ago when he went to Haiti and intervened to bring about a negotiated settlement to the crisis there.

Abigail, the royal diplomat, the accomplished peacemaker, returns home in triumph. The Messianic king had received her tribute. His wrath had been cooled; war had been averted; peace was restored.

When she gets home, however, there is no royal reception and no giving of thanks, only silence from the fool.

II. Silence from the Fool (25:36-38)

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. But it came about in the morning, when the wine had gone out of Nabal, that his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him so that he became as a stone. And about ten days later, it happened that the Lord struck Nabal, and he died.

Abigail returns to find Nabal making merry in his own personal orgy. Instead of paying tribute to Israel's king, he gives himself a party "fit for a king." Fools make a habit of rewarding themselves. Nabal is dead drunk, his senses dulled, his mind oblivious to the holocaust that had almost annihilated his home. What a painful return home for Abigail! But, her expectations were not very high. Nabal's drunken behavior was nothing new to her. He was best at indulging himself. How could he possibly be expected to grant his wife the honor due her in her finest hour?

Yet, in the face of this rejection, Abigail does not withdraw in pained silence. She knows her work as a diplomat is not yet finished; she has some loose ends to tie up. However, wisdom dictated that this was not the proper time to press ahead. In the kingdom of God, timing is everything. Abigail wisely restrains her emotions and her words. She decides to let the orgy continue until the final drink is consumed and the deeds of darkness have run their course. Morning would come, and with it the light of day.

Nabal awakens with a terrible hangover. Wisely, Abigail waits until the wine from the previous night's excesses had "gone out" of this male (this is reminiscent of the crude word for male "those who urinate against the wall," vv 22, 34). Now, at the opportune time, with little emotion, she conveys to Nabal the bare facts of the situation that had almost resulted in disaster. She informs him that David, the one to whom he had refused hospitality, was the anointed king of Israel, and so provoked was he by Nabal's refusal that he took an oath of holy war against Nabal. His assembled army was right at the front door when these matters came to Abigail's attention through one of the servants. Recognizing the urgency of the crisis, she had no time to speak to Nabal but, acting on his behalf, she had offered David gifts in appreciation for the protection his men had provided their flocks from marauding bands. She regarded his unsolicited protection as the gracious hand of God blessing them, and she deemed it appropriate to offer thanks out of their plentiful harvest. David had received her gift, saying that if she had not intervened, not one male in Nabal's household would have been

alive by morning.

What powerful words to receive on an empty stomach and an aching head! Suddenly, Nabal becomes dreadfully sober. Hearing the news, his heart "died within him so that he became as a stone." This phrase is reminiscent of Abigail's prophetic words in 25:29, that God would make David's enemies fit into the hollow of a sling and would fling them away. The word for "as a stone," is the same word as the name for "nabal" spelt backwards. Fokkelman comments: "The name of the man is turned upside down in an alliteration which underlines his end...As soon as he, really the only one who urinates against the wall, emerges from the night of carousal, he comes up against a wall in time and space." Ten days later, God struck Nabal and he died. "Nabal dies like someone who cannot remain sober when some of his possessions are given away" (Fokkelman).

Why did God wait ten days? He waited because he loves even fools. The purpose behind the painful exposure of fools is not to condemn them, but to warn them of the judgment to come. God in his grace gave Nabal, the fool of fools, an opportunity to repent. How different is God from Nabal! Nabal made David's men wait for an answer so as to exercise his control and dominate them, but God waits for Nabal, not to control him but to free him. With patient, forbearing love, God allows us to exercise our freedom and repent. But that window of opportunity does not remain open forever. After ten days, with no response from Nabal to the Messianic King, the waiting was over. God struck Nabal, and he died.

So Abigail receives a blessing from the king, and silence from the fool.

There is more in store for her.

III. Joy For the New Bride (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. 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." And 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." 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. David had also taken Ahinoam of Jezreel, and they both became his wives. Now Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Palti the son of Laish, who was from Gallim.

When David receives the news of Nabal's death, he blesses the God who had become his advocate, judged

his cause, and vindicated his life. At the same time he is extremely grateful that God directly intervened to prevent him from sinning. So overwhelmed is he with appreciation that he does not wait for his coronation to fulfill his vow to Abigail “to remember her” with a royal gift. Now that she is a widow, he proposes to her with the same haste that she intervened for him, offering to personally care for her all the days of her life. “Levenson and Halpern propose that, with this alliance with Abigail, David claimed considerable wealth, territory, and influence, which had been Nabal’s and which helped form a political and economic base for his Hebron governance” (Brueggemann).

Abigail’s response is typical. She does not feel worthy, but welcomes the status of a female servant in the royal house, that of washing the feet of David’s servants. She has good experience for this task, having just washed the feet of the king.

The story ends much like it began, with Abigail, in haste, in a procession with her donkeys, a picture of humility, on her way to meet the royal figure. This time, however, instead of confronting a king in his wrath, she is headed to his warm embrace. A war has been averted, and a wedding inaugurated.

Lest we think that the threat of Saul is finished, or that his jealousy has been assuaged by his admission of David’s right to the crown (chapter 24), the narrator takes us back to the court. Saul is still angrily throwing spears at David. He gives away Michal, David’s wife and his own daughter. But if Saul gives away one wife, David acquires two.

Brueggemann comments: “The story is direct, candid, earthy. At the two crucial points, however, concerning Abigail’s intervention and Nabal’s death, Yahweh is the decisive actor. David’s life follows Yahweh’s faithful intention. Abigail serves that intention in everything she says and does. All her actions are informed by her conviction that David will have a ‘sure house.’ That house is made more sure by the restraint of David and the decisive work of Yahweh.”

I will conclude by giving three perspectives on this text. I will ask us all to put ourselves in the place of each of the three main characters, Nabal, David, and Abigail, that we might learn the lesson that each of them learned.

IV. Three Reflections

(a) From the perspective of the fool

First, picture Nabal, the fool, dead drunk and blind at his own party. The lesson is this: Idolatry isolates us from others. It cuts us off from life and relationships; it shuts our eyes to what the Messianic King is doing all around us. Yet God waited ten days for Nabal to see the light and repent. Some of you may be like Nabal. You come to church, but you leave unmoved. You go home and embrace your own wealth, your own idols, and in-

dulge your own pleasures. You regard all that you have earned as rightfully yours, for your private indulgence. Like Nabal, you hold your own private orgies in the night, and nothing happens. If this describes you, the psalmist has a word for you:

**“These things you have done and I kept silent;
you thought I was altogether like you.
But I will rebuke you and accuse you to your face.”**
(Ps 50:21)

You may be as blind as Nabal, and the angel of death may have come close to annihilating you, but you are alive today because an Abigail was praying for you. One day the waiting will come to an end. And do not be deceived into thinking that this is merely an Old Testament story of a God of judgment; that in the new order, everything is forgiven I remind you of Paul’s word to the church in Corinth. Some of the believers there were participating in the LORD’s feast in an unholy manner. The rich were indulging themselves in an orgy of their own, gorging themselves before the poor arrived at the love feast. Listen to the apostle’s sober words to them: “That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 11:30). If this description fits you, I say, with Paul, “Wake up O fool! Arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

(b) From the perspective of the King

What did David, the Messianic king, learn from all of this? Was it proper for Israel’s king to “save” himself, or to take vengeance? The answer is no. David confessed, “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 evil-doing of Nabal on his own head.” Just as David was restrained from taking vengeance on Saul, so also he was restrained from taking vengeance on a fool. The message is clear: Never repay evil for evil. “‘Vengeance is Mine,’ says the Lord.”

The second lesson for David is this: Where and how should the king find provision for his men? In this story, two kings were living on the same land. One had Spirit, the other had land. Why not make an alliance — protection for food? That would be a wise move, wouldn’t it? No, it would not. The king of Spirit is to be provided for by the *willing* gifts of the populace as they recognize that he is the Messianic king. Gifts are to be given spontaneously, in appreciation. As witnessed in his building of the temple later, never again would David attempt coercion as a means of receiving provisions or money.

The theme continues in the story of Jesus. In the wilderness, Jesus too was tempted to use his office to feed himself. The devil tempted him, saying, “If you are the new Moses, turn these stones into bread.” But Jesus refused. (Moses, of course, used his office to feed others, not himself.) David had his four hundred men to feed, but Jesus had his five thousand. What if Jesus had made an alliance with Herod, asking for government assis-

tance to help him feed his flock? That would have destroyed his whole program, wouldn't it? Yet this is what the church continues to do again and again, seeking gifts from the world to further the work of the ministry. Jesus fed his people with bread from heaven — and there was enough left over to provide a basketfull for each of the apostles. As they used their office to serve others, there would be plenty left over for them. The Didache, a document summing up the teachings of the apostles, written about 50 A.D., stated that if a teacher even asked for money it was an indication that he was a false prophet. How the church would be cleansed if we abided by these sentiments today!

(c) From the perspective of Abigail

I am impressed by Abigail's discernment and her skill in negotiating, but I am even more impressed by how seriously she took her wedding vows. When she signed on "for better or worse," she meant it. She believed that God would work on her husband; she would do nothing to manipulate the circumstances. At the right time, the Messianic king visited her home. How tragic it would have been had she divorced Nabal! She would not have been there to intervene between these two angry men.

At times in this church we counsel separation for some couples in order to allow God to work to soften hearts and bring about reconciliation. Around this time last year a woman told me she was separating from her abusive husband. He was a controller, and a fool. I met with him, shared the gospel with him, and in time he came to Christ. But a new revelation doesn't necessarily imply an immediate change in character. His wife told me she was divorcing him. I asked her what was the hurry. They were still separated, there was time for God

to work, so why place time limits on what God was doing? A month ago, I got the following note from her: "Thank you for your advice that I not divorce my husband, but give him time for the Lord to work with him. You suggested at least a year. We ended our separation when I moved back home after eleven months. You were right." What an encouraging letter in these days of easy divorce!

Abigail took her vows seriously.

I am also impressed by her humility. She was humble enough to bow before the Messianic King and to take the blame for her husband's refusal to provide for his men. When David proposed to her, she responded by saying, "Behold, your maidservant is a maid to wash the feet of my lord's servants." This image of humility, the washing of one's feet, was immortalized by our Lord in the Upper Room (John 13) as the highest calling of saints and the supreme task of kings.

Paul offers this as one of the essential criteria for the high office of widows who would serve full-time in the church. "Let a widow be put on the list...if she has washed the feet of the saints" (1 Tim 5:10). This is what gives joy (the essence of Abigail's name) — serving the King of kings in this way, not lobbying causes, seeking one's own rights and controlling others, but taking the blame, disarming people, and reconciling them to one another and to God. This is invisible and often unrecognized work. It goes on in the privacy of homes, in counseling rooms, in hallway conversations, in the most unlikely places. The church needs more Abigails to do the work of washing feet. We need them in our schools, in our neighborhoods, in the workplace. May God grant us the grace to enter into this high calling, that we may be found among the peacemakers, "*for they shall be called sons of God.*" Amen.

© 1994 Peninsula Bible Church/Cupertino