

Message – 1 Samuel 25 – **Abigail – The Courageous Wife**

Last Sunday we learned about, Thomas, an apostle who had a bad rap for speaking out when others were too timid to do so.

Today, we'll turn our attention to a female Biblical heroine. She's not as famous as Deborah, the Judge, who lead Israel in crushing the mighty army of King Jabin of Canaan (Judges 4). Nor is she the world renown Mary, mother of Jesus, who courageously agreed to an unbelievable pregnancy risking ridicule, divorce, and worst, being taken to a rock concert. That's the event where the adulteress takes center stage while getting stoned. Today, I will introduce you to Abigail, a courageous wife whose quick thinking saved the day.

1. The Historical Background

Today's story opens with the death of Samuel. Compared to the previous Judges before him, the whole nation of Israel was united in mourning his death. At this time, David, still a fugitive hunted by King Saul, moved to the wilderness of Paran with his six hundred warriors. Paran is located at the southern tip of Israel below the Dead Sea. It was sort of a no man's land like the wild west. It was a remote and lawless territory where anyone living there was on his own. Livestock and herds grazing there could fall prey to rustlers and wild animals. Fortunately, for the shepherds and ranchers, David and his men acted as peacekeepers and lawmen of the southern frontier. They're not paid for their police work but, traditionally, the ranchers would voluntarily offer compensation in appreciation of their services.

2. The Odd Couple

a) Nabal - The Foolish Husband

One of the ranchers living in this area is Nabal, a descendant of Caleb. In the Book of Joshua, Caleb was given the Hebron territory after he defeated the giant sons of Anak. Due to his ancestry, Nabal was apparently a prominent tribal leader in Hebron.

"Nabal" in Hebrew means "fool." It's probably his nickname, because what father would name his son, "fool." Anyway, the historian may have suppressed his real name to highlight his character, instead.

By the way, when the Bible uses the term, "fool," it's not talking about a dumb or ignorant person – it refers to someone who lives their life as if there's no God.

Ps. 14:1 says, "The fool says in his heart, there is no God". By that definition, there are a lot of "Nabals" in the world today.

Those are people going about their lives as "practical atheists". Maybe they "say", they believe there is a God, but they live each day as if God doesn't exist. (you probably know some people like that.)

b) The Courageous Wife

However, this “fool” married well. Abigail is his wife, she was not only intelligent, she was beautiful as well. She had beauty and brains – that’s a winning combination. Her name means “my father is joyous,” and her beauty was more than skin deep. As we’ll discover, she was lovely not only on the outside, but on the inside as well. This marriage is a pairing of complete opposites like night and day. We have a beautiful and intelligent woman – the good wife, married to this rude and mean fool. A winner married to a loser called Fool.

By the way, we also need to take in consideration, in those days, marriages were mostly a business arrangement between fathers. Abigail’s father must have thought it was good for her to marry a filthy rich man. It was not the result of a courtship and love as we know it today. So, we really can’t blame Abigail for marrying a fool.

3. The Conflict

It was like the old style of a western cattle roundup but in this case it’s the shearing of sheep. That’s the time of the year, when the sheep are tallied and their fleece is shaved. It was the tradition to have a big party in celebration. Nabal’s block party was huge considering he had 4,000 sheep. That would mean about 40 shepherds plus families, relatives and neighbors as guests.

It was also customary, at this event, to set aside a portion of the profit. This would be given to those who had protected the shepherds and the flock during the past year. It was like tipping the waiter. There was no law that you had to, but, it wasn’t a bad idea.

So, you can picture the efficient, capable hostess, Abigail, supervising the big celebration. It probably went on for days. Eventually, news of the party reached the wilderness where David and his men were hanging out – “Nabal had a profitable year and he’s throwing a party! That means “payday.” All year, they faithfully protected his flock, so it’s reasonable to expect a generous tip.

So David sent 10 men to politely ask Nabal for whatever he feels is fair to share with them for the protection they provided. Even Nabal’s own employees affirmed this fact.

But, the fool responded to the gracious request of David, with a barrage of insults.

First, Nabal dismissed David as a nobody, a zero. David? David who? Of course, Nabal was proud to be a descendant of the great Caleb who stood with Joshua in giving a pep talk to Israel to invade Canaan as God has promised to give them. Israel was fearful of the bad report, “The land we traveled through and explored will devour anyone who goes to live there. All the people we saw were huge. We even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak. Next to them we felt like grasshoppers, and that’s what they thought, too!” (Numbers 13:32-33, New Living Translation)

Also, the Caleb, who at the youthful age of 85, (Joshua 14) asked Joshua permission to take on the dreaded giant Anakim in their huge fortified cities. That’s how Caleb’s tribe inherited the Hebron territory.

Second, Nabal implied that David and his men were just a bunch of runaway slaves who were disloyal to Saul and Israel. Then he slapped them with the final insult in verse 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?" Or, in other words, "I'd rather give the reward of labor to those who worked for it instead of a bunch of protection racketeers trying to extort a living from real producers like me."

Take note of the discipline displayed by David's men – no argument, no counter insult, no fighting – they simply left.

Upon hearing Nabal's response, David totally lost it, He quickly ordered 400 of his men to bring their swords -- he was out for blood. He was going to massacre all the men in Nabal's household.

Keep in mind that David is emotionally vulnerable at this time. Samuel, his mentor and who anointed him king just died. His wife, Michal, was taken away by Saul and given to another (v. 44). This unfortunate turn of events may have been factors in David's violent reaction to Nabal's insults.

Meanwhile, (back at the ranch), a servant tells Abigail what her foolish husband just did. Notice, they didn't go to Nabal, mostly because he was unapproachable, but also because he was probably drunk by then.

The courageous wife, Abigail, knows exactly what she needs to do. She perceives the consequences of her foolish husband's careless words. She also understands how men react to demeaning insults. In Tagalog, we call that "nakakalalaki" or "masculining" over you.

What can we learn from Abigail's crisis management

4. Crisis Management

a) Don't waste time in futile arguments

Abigail didn't waste any time telling "the fool," that he was a fool. In fact, she didn't even get into a fight with him at all. She did what her future stepson, Solomon, wrote as a proverb...

Don't waste your breath on fools,
for they will despise the wisest advice. (Prov. 23:9)

Or

"Don't argue with a jerk, while he or she is being a jerk."

When someone is so arrogant and so full of himself, ... you can talk to him until you're blue in the face... but he won't hear a thing.

b) Don't whine, do something

Abigail refused to play the role of the victim. She refused to be victimized by her husband's stupidity.

She didn't just lock herself in her room pouting or singing the blues watching her world collapsing around her. Whining... woe is me, our life is falling apart... we're doomed... but what can I do? I'm supposed to be his obedient, submissive wife."

But, as a courageous wife, she did something about it. She got busy packing a carry out feast, baking bread, making lamb chops, packing fig newtons, jamming raisin cakes into sacks and loading several gallons of wine on donkeys. That's Abigail's version of Grubhub or Doordash. This intelligent, beautiful, brave woman took action to save her husband's neck and hers, too, because that's what a good mate does. And all the while, she was mentally preparing her diplomatic speech to David.

Then she went and intercepted David and his posse on their way to annihilate Nabal and his brood.

Verse 23-25 – As soon as Abigail saw David, she got off her donkey and fell on her knees at his feet, her face to the ground in homage. Then, taking the blame for the crisis, she pleads with David to ignore her wicked husband's foolishness. He's just living up to his name, a "fool."

Dismounting in the presence of a superior is the highest token of respect that can be given. After taking the blame for her husband's foolish actions, she asks for forgiveness and pleads with David to accept her gifts and to spare Nabal and the others. Then she reminds David to avoid a blood-stained legacy even before He becomes king. "Now, my lord, as surely as the Lord lives and you yourself live, since the Lord has kept you from murdering and taking vengeance into your own hands, let all your enemies and those who try to harm you be as cursed as Nabal is." (1 Sam. 25:26, NIV)

Abigail's argument here can be summed up rather simply: "David, you can trust your God to fight your battles for you. Taking matters into your own hands will only leave you with regret." Abigail truly proves herself to be intelligent, not only arguing with David logically but evoking a specific memory of David's as well. It is no accident that she reaches for the metaphor of the "sling" to describe God's avenging David's enemies in verse 29. With one little sling David had shown to the entire nation of Israel that the battle belongs to God. And as easily as David took down Goliath, Abigail reasons, would not God surely do what is just with regard to Nabal the fool?

God prevented David from becoming king by murdering every civilian who refused him a request for food or insulted him. Instead, let God do the avenging.

After listening to Abigail, David said, "Thank God for your good sense! Bless you for keeping me from murder and from carrying out vengeance with my own hands." (v. 33, NLT)

Abigail's sensible action overcame the rage in David's heart and he relented from pursuing a bloody vengeance. Disaster was avoided.

Brothers, if that's the kind of woman you have this morning, consider yourself blessed. I know I am. I have no idea how many times my wife has saved me from embarrassment and conflicts because of my knee-jerk reactions. Brothers, we all need an Abigail to protect us from our careless speech and actions.

Actually, brothers, if you're wise, you'll discover that some of the best advice you can get will come from your wife... provided you're not too proud or defensive to listen. God has made women especially sensitive to character issues, and guys, we only hurt ourselves when we make the mistake of confusing their suggestions for nagging.

But wait, how about Eph. 5:22 that says, Wives, submit to your husbands...?" Of course, I agree with that verse.

But, I also believe that men make that submission very difficult for their wives when they don't take seriously the next 10 verses about loving their wives as Christ loved the church and died for her.

Anyway, that's another message...

5. The Finale

The brave wife returns home after saving the day. Her husband didn't even notice she'd been gone. He's too busy partying and getting drunk. So, Abigail says nothing and lets him sleep it off.

In the morning, when he's sober, she tells him about the whole incident. About David and his 400 men coming to crash the party to slaughter them and how she literally saved their lives.

Now Nabal gets really sober. Actually, stone sober as in paralyzed with terror. He got shocked to learn he almost got killed for his foolishness. He probably had a stroke. After ten days in a coma, God ended his life.

Nabal may have been in Jesus' mind, when He ended the story of the man obsessed with building barns to store his surplus wealth. "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' " (Luke 12:20 NIV).

Now, back to our heroine. Abigail, what a wonderful woman! She's wise, a peacemaker, beautiful inside and out, a courageous wife – now freed from a jerk of a husband.

Then, David came and married her.

"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." (1 Sa. 25:39, ESV)

God also used this marriage towards David becoming a king. David first becomes king in Hebron (2 Samuel 2:1-4). David's rise to kingship in Hebron is associated with his arrival in Hebron accompanied by his two wives, Abigail of Carmel and Ahinoam of Jezreel (v. 43), both of whom lived in proximity to Hebron. After King Saul's death, David reigned over Judah for over seven years in Hebron before ruling over Israel from Jerusalem. It's a nice chapter in David's life with a fairy tale ending.

Now What?

1) Speak up for God

You can never measure the impact of godly witnessing with your words and actions to others. Abigail's timely intervention shows that when we have wisdom to impart, faith to share, and help to offer, we must dare to act regardless of the risk it may involve. Consider this when you are hesitant to share the gospel.

2) Put the jerks of your life in God's hands.

Who's the jerk in your life that needs transforming? Husband? Wife? Boss? Co-worker? Relative? Son? Daughter? Church leader? ...Maybe even YOU!

Put them into God's hands this morning... Pray for them and wait for the right time to talk to them.

3) Express your appreciation to your spouse.

Abigail never received a thank you after saving her husband's life.

Brothers and sisters, how about you? Take the time to tell your spouse something like...

"Thank you for all you do. I don't even want to think about what life would be without you. I love you." It's best to be specific. Name the reasons you appreciate her.