

## Abigail: A Woman of Good Sense

### 1 Samuel 25

Unsung Heroes and Heroines of the Faith

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There are three main characters in this story, and two of them are fools.

The most obvious fool is Nabal. Nabal vehemently refuses to share his wealth with anyone, least of all with David, even though David's army has been protecting Nabal's flocks from predators and thieves. Nabal slanders David, denies his request for food, and stomps off to a party where he becomes hopelessly drunk. In the Hebrew language the literal meaning of Nabal, is fool, and a fool he is.

The other fool is David. Yes, God has chosen David to be the future king of Israel, but election to public office (as this city surely knows) doesn't guarantee unimpeachable behavior. So when David learns of Nabal's insult, he flies into a foolish rage. "David said to his men, 'Every man gird on his sword!' And every man of them girded on his sword; David also girded on his sword; and about four hundred men went up after David." This is vengeance, pure and simple. "So, Nabal wants to know 'Who is David?' I'll show him who David is! When I get through with him, he'll wish he had showed a little more respect for the son of Jesse!"

The same vengeful beast crouches just under my surface, ready to spring at the slightest provocation. When a driver cuts me off on Nebraska Avenue, I want to retaliate. When my bank credits my thousand dollar deposit to someone else and then waits for over two months to admit they made a mistake, I am ready to sue. When my electricity isn't restored after a couple of days I want to picket PEPCO! I am just as prone to knee jerk reactions as David was, and I often live to regret it.

Abigail is the only one who shows good sense.

To begin with, SHE INTERVENED BETWEEN THE TWO FOOLISH MEN. She stepped between them to stop them from killing each other. She was even willing to take upon herself the penalty for her husband's foolishness: "Upon me alone, my lord, be the guilt," she said. And when the text tells us that she "fell before David on her face, and bowed to the ground," we are meant to understand that she was exposing her neck to his sword. She was offering her innocent life in place of her guilty husband.

I see Jesus in Abigail. Jesus intervened to reconcile us to God and to one another. Paul said it best in 2 Corinthians 5:19: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them." And Peter wrote (1 Peter 3:18) "Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God." So when we watch Abigail intervene between these two enemies we get a preview of Christ's reconciling work in our behalf.

Second, ABIGAIL INSISTED THAT DAVID COUNT TO TEN. When she first meets him on the road, David is in a towering rage. Everything he says is skewed and hateful, totally out of touch with reality. Abigail insists that he stop and count to ten, so he can take an objective look at what is going on. And when he does, two things become clear. First, Nabal is a fool, but he doesn't deserve to die. Second, David will be a greater fool if he lets his anger get the best of him. If he kills Nabal he will bring bloodguilt upon himself, the guilt of taking another man's life for an offense that was little more than a petty brush-off.

I try to count to ten when someone responds rudely on the phone or overcharges me at the checkout counter. I ask myself, "Will I remember this incident five years from now?" Invariably the answer is "No, I won't remember this five days from now, let alone five years." Well, then, why say or do something that I WILL remember five years from now, something I will remember with shame? Let's emulate Abigail's good sense. Let's take an objective look at the circumstances before we ride off like vigilantes on

expeditions of reprisal.

Finally, ABIGAIL INVOKED DAVID'S BETTER SELF. She said to him, "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." (25:28) In other words, "The Lord has a magnificent future in store for you, David; don't do something now that will stain your reputation and forfeit your future." And David responded, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent you to meet me today! Blessed be your good sense, and blessed be you, who have kept me today from bloodguilt and from avenging myself by my own hand."

I want very much to invoke your better self today. God has a wonderful plan for your life. Don't spoil that plan with petty resentments, trivial grudges, and foolish vendettas. Take the high road, the Abigail road, the road of good sense.

There is a contemporary Abigail whom I admire immensely. His name is Nelson Mandela. If ever anyone had a right to nurse on the bitter milk of resentment, it was Nelson Mandela. Mandela was imprisoned for twenty-nine years because of his militant opposition to apartheid in South Africa. When he was sentenced to life imprisonment, he said this in his own defense:

I have fought against white domination and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.

Shortly after his release from prison in 1990, Nelson Mandela stood on the steps of the Cape Town city hall to address a crowd of several thousand people. There was not a hint of vengeance in his voice. Instead he began with these words: "Friends, comrades and fellow South Africans. I greet you all in the name of peace, democracy and freedom for all." And he ended his speech with the paragraph I quoted a moment ago, the pledge he had made at his trial, the pledge to live together in harmony, the pledge for which he had been prepared to die. Thank God he lived to save his nation from a terrible blood bath. Thank God for his good sense to foster a "democratic and free society" in South Africa.

And where did this good sense come from? I'd like to believe that Mandela's childhood education in the Healdtown Methodist Boarding School might have had something to do with it. In Abigail's case, the Lord had everything to do with it. Six times in her speech to David, Abigail invokes the name of the Lord. And in the last of the six, she speaks of the Lord who "had dealt well" with David. How then could he do anything less than deal well with Nabal?

You have only to look at the cross to know that the Lord has dealt well with us. Jesus Christ did not retaliate for our offenses against God. Instead, he stood between us and the judgment we deserve. He took the penalty for our sins upon himself on the cross. How then can we do anything less than deal well with others?

Have you had a kindness shown? Pass it on.

'Twas not given for thee alone, Pass it on.

Let it travel down the years, Let it wipe another's tears, 'Till in heaven the deed appears< Pass it on.