

1 Samuel 25 is the center of the Adventures of David.

The whole narrative is focused around David and Saul,
with the Philistines as the main foil to their relationship.
But chapter 25 tells the story of how David married Abigail.

What is 1 Samuel 25 doing?

Is it simply an interesting story about David
that the author decided to “throw in” just for fun?

Probably not.

And especially because chapter 25
is sandwiched in between the two stories of how David spared Saul.

And the story of Abigail is carefully crafted.

You can see from the outline in your bulletin
that the story consists of three concentric chiasms.

The narrative is carried by speeches –
and the longest and most important speech is right at the middle –
and in the voice of Abigail.

The story of Nabal and Abigail is at the very center of “The Adventures of David.”

It is surrounded by the two episodes of Saul being given into David’s hand.

It is preceded by the story of David in the Judean wilderness;
it is followed by David in the land of the Philistines.

The Adventures of David begin with the death of Goliath.

They end with the death of Saul.

And in the middle come the deaths of Samuel and Nabal.

In these central episodes in 1 Samuel 24-26

we hear of what will happen to all of David’s enemies.

David’s enemies will be destroyed–

not because of David’s might and power,
but because the LORD was with David.

It is not David’s military might,

but his faith and trust in Yahweh
that give him the victory!

Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD!

And as that was true for David,
so was it most powerfully true for our Lord Jesus Christ,
and therefore it is true for us as well!

Wait upon the LORD and he will accomplish his purposes for you.

Introduction: The Death of Samuel (v1)

Now Samuel died. And all Israel assembled and mourned for him, and they buried him in his house at Ramah.

We start with the death of Samuel – which should remind us of Samuel’s mother, Hannah. Hannah had prayed for the coming king – the LORD’s anointed.

Our text connects the death of Samuel with the death of Nabal.

It could be that he is simply a chronicler,
and these two deaths happen to come at the same time,
but all that would do is push us back to the question of what was God doing
in arranging history that way!
And given how neatly the whole narrative is structured,
I am not persuaded that Samuel’s appearance in 1 Samuel 25 is just happenstance.

Do you remember how a woman played the central role at the beginning of the book?
Get ready – we’ve got another woman coming right up!

1. The Folly of Nabal (v2-17)

a. Nabal and Abigail (v2-3)

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.

David has fled to the wilderness of Paran.

The wilderness of Paran is where Israel wandered in the wilderness.
It is the place from which Moses sent the 12 spies into the land of Canaan.

Maon and Carmel are mentioned in Joshua 15 in connection with Ziph
as cities in the inheritance of Judah in the south of the land.

Carmel means “garden” and was apparently a very fruitful land
(Josiah would later have vineyards in this region).

Apparently this man’s sheep were pasturing in the wilderness of Paran,
and now they are coming back north to Carmel and Maon.
(Not to be confused with Mt Carmel in the north).

It is worth noting that Nabal is not named until verse 3 –
after his business is described.

“There was a man” – whose life was devoted to his business.

There was a man who was very rich.

He was so preoccupied with his business that we forgot to tell you his name –

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.

his name was *Nabal* – which means “Fool.”

When you get entirely focused on your business – your wealth – your ministry – your stuff – then you become a fool.

And Nabal is said to be a “Calebite.”

Caleb was one of the 2 faithful spies.

But while Nabal does not live up to his illustrious ancestor,
he does live up to the meaning of Caleb’s name:

Caleb means dog!

And Nabal is a dog – harsh and badly behaved.

But his wife, Abigail, is described as “discerning and beautiful” – words that described David earlier:

in 1 Samuel 16 and 17 we are told that David was beautiful,
and in 1 Samuel 18, it says four times that David acted wisely.

In other words, David has met his match!

My dear friend Sharon Covington refers to Abigail as “the patron saint of abused wives.”

But while her husband is harsh and badly behaved –
she does not act like a victim.

There is nothing in her demeanor or tone
that suggests that she thinks of herself as helpless
or even that she is afraid of her husband.

Why are there so many remarkable women in the pages of scripture?

We could say, “by the grace of God” -- and that would be right.

But I'm actually interested in a different point:

what sort of culture produces a Naomi, a Hannah, an Abigail –
or, for that matter, a Ruth!

(Remember that Ruth is a Moabite -- so we are not just talking about “Christian culture”).

People sometimes refer to ancient cultures as “patriarchal” –

and maybe that’s accurate –

but when I listen to modern people talk about “patriarchy”

I seriously doubt that ancient culture resembled that!

Modern people talk about patriarchy as a world in which “men” are over “women.”

Well, that's not Abigail's world.

Nabal's servants understand very well that he is a fool –
and they turn to Abigail for wisdom and protection.
As the wife of the lord, she has power over all of the men in her community,
except her husband
(and even then, well, there's that line about the neck that turns the head...).

David seems to think that he will need 400 men in order to overwhelm Nabal.
That suggests that Nabal probably has a hundred men at his command.
That probably means a community of 800 to 1000 people
who are under his protection.
That means a thousand people who look to Abigail to fix things!

In one sense she's "trapped" in an abusive marriage – yes.
But in another sense, she is herself a powerful woman who has the ability and the calling
to protect those under her care.

This is one of the problems with the individualism of our culture.
When each individual is treated as an isolated unit –
then a family becomes a pair of isolated units,
and so it is relatively easy for an abuser to control the abused.
When people are interconnected in a complex web of relationships,
it is much more difficult to "get away with it."

Another part of the problem is that in American culture,
there is such an emphasis on everyone being "equal"
that there is no room for complicated relationships of authority.
The older language of "superiors, inferiors, and equals" sounds strange to us –
and when we do acknowledge authority, it tends to be absolute: A is over B.

But the older language also recognized multiple ways
authority could work within a single relationship.

So, for instance, when we are working on a house project,
I may be William's father (his superior in the family),
but he is plainly my superior in knowledge and craft –
and therefore I need to obey him in matters of craft!

Likewise, Virginia is my wife -- but on the board of South Bend TradeWorks she is my equal –
and in matters of color and design (and *many* other ways) she is my superior.

If I were to insist on my positional superiority as husband in order to get my way,
I would be a Nabal.

b. David's Request for Hospitality (v4-9)

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.

Well, David hears that Nabal is shearing sheep –
and so he sends ten young men (ten servants) with a message of peace.
It opens “peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have”
We protected your sheep in the wilderness,
now please give us something in response.
This is a request for hospitality,
which conceals a demand.

You need to understand the culture in order to understand what is happening.
The ancient near east operates in what is called a “gift-exchange” economy –
not a contract economy.

When David provided protection for Nabal’s shepherds,
that created an obligation on Nabal’s part to offer “hospitality.”

And David words everything very respectfully,
even identifying himself as “your son David.”

c. Nabal’s Insulting Rejection (v10-11)

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.

Nabal makes David’s servants wait (a good way to intimidate!)
and then says “Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse?”

In other words, Nabal knows who David is.
This is analogous to Pharaoh’s “Who is the LORD?” in Exodus.
Why should I listen to you?
Who do you think you are?!

Nabal has no intention of siding with the son of Jesse.
“There are many servants who are breaking away from their masters!”
Plainly Nabal sides with Saul – or at least, that’s his excuse!

In fact, Nabal is only concerned with himself and his own things:

(READ v 11)

*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?"*

The fool only sees what is good for his own kingdom – his own wealth and estate.
He does not seek first the kingdom of God.

b'. David's Impatient Response (v12-13)

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.

At this point, David's response probably surprises us.

He had been patient with Saul, the LORD's anointed,
but when scorned by the brute, Nabal,
David appears to be ready to take out his frustrations on Nabal.

So David arms four hundred men for battle, and heads toward Nabal.

a'. The Servant's Intercession with Abigail (v14-17)

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 our master and against all his house, and he is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him."

Meanwhile, one of Nabal's servants warns Abigail of what is happening.

There was no point in going to Nabal.

Nabal is a son of Belial – a worthless man –

the term "son of Belial" has been used of the sons of Eli (in chapter 2),

those who opposed Saul in chapter 10,

and Hannah had insisted that she was *not* a daughter of Belial in chapter 1.

You cannot reason with a son of Belial –
and Abigail agrees.

2. The Wisdom of Abigail (v18-35)

a. The Gift Prepared (v18-19)

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.

She takes matters into her own hands and sends a present to David.

Her gift is a gift fit for a king.

The fact that she is able to prepare all this in such a short time
makes clear that we are dealing with a substantial household!
Who has 200 loaves of bread ready?

(Remember that Nabal is preparing for a feast...)

But as you watch Abigail in this story,
you realize that Abigail's power is very much *womanly* power.

This is why I have titled the sermon, "Lady Wisdom."

Abigail embodies what Proverbs 1-9 says about Lady Wisdom –
and for that matter, she very strongly resembles the Proverbs 31 woman
at the end of the book.

After all, even when Abigail acts in defiance of her husband and brings David food for his men,
she does so in order to do good to her husband –
to protect him from certain death
(even insisting that David should kill her instead of her husband).
She is an excellent example of someone who waited upon the LORD –
and so was ready to act when the time came.

b. David's Attitude – Vengeance (v20-22)

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.

Only now – as we approach Nabal's village do we hear what David had said previously:

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.”

David is set on vengeance.

Probably verse 22 is a self-maledictory oath –

“God do so to *David* and more also...”

In other words, may God strike me down if I do not strike down the males of that fool!

The word translated “male”
is a phrase: “those who piss on the wall.”

The image is of someone who can stand up as he does his business –
which is why the ESV says “male” –
but there is a second image that is going on here:

What sort of creature pisses on walls?
Dogs.
Calebites.

David is dead set on vengeance!

c. Abigail’s Plea – Saving with Your Own Hand? (v23-31)

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,

Abigail treats David as if he were already king.
She bows before him as a supplicant –
and her words are full of humility and submission –
(she refers to him as “my lord” fourteen times in eight verses!).
She speaks as one who knows that her power is found in her words – not her sword.

She says—in effect:
Don’t pay attention to that worthless fellow (lit., “son of Beliar”--
the same term that is used for Eli’s sons)
--that fool Nabal.
He is aptly named (I should know—I have to live with him).

But Yahweh has sent me to you to restrain you from becoming like my husband.
You are the LORD’s anointed,
and it is beneath you to act like Saul and Nabal.
Remember how you defeated Goliath with a sling?
The lives of your enemies “he shall sling out as from the hollow of a sling”

This speech is the center of this passage –
and this passage is the center of “the Adventure of David” –
which means that Abigail’s speech is at the heart of this whole narrative.

“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.

In her opening statement, she offers to bear the guilt of her husband – even though she was not there to see the young men.

In her central admonition she swears by the LORD – and by David’s soul – that she is the agent of Yahweh’s deliverance.

Notice how she says it in verse 26:

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.

You were about to bring bloodguilt upon yourself through slaughtering Nabal’s men.
But now Yahweh has restrained you!
(through my voice – which you are going to obey).
She is commanding the LORD’s anointed.

This is one courageous woman.

Having accepted the sin of her husband upon herself, she brings her guilt offering to David:

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.

And before the LORD says it to David – Abigail says it first:

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.

Reminding David of his battle with Goliath,
she reminds him that it was the LORD who delivered him from Goliath –
and it will be the LORD who will deliver him from all his enemies:

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.

In effect, Abigail is asking David,
Do you really trust God?
Do you really believe that God will do what he has promised?
If so – then you have nothing to fear from my nasty husband!

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.”

Furthermore, when God does to my husband what he will do to all your enemies,
please consider me as a wife.

That’s what “remember your servant” means.

If God does to your enemies what he says he will do,
then my husband will be dead soon...
and I’ll be a widow.

Where did Abigail learn to speak with such confidence and wisdom?

In a culture that valued the voice of Lady Wisdom.

She does not speak “like a man.”
She speaks as a woman.

And by that I don’t mean that she “uses her feminine charm” – bleah!

There is nothing in the text about that!

Our text focuses on her *words*.

In theory, a man could say all the same words.
But the same words sound different in a woman’s voice.

In our culture we need to be careful – because we have often discounted a woman’s voice,
so that words are taken *less seriously* when a woman says it.

What does it mean to value the voice of Lady Wisdom?

There are several women who speak in the book of Samuel-Kings.
There is the wise woman of Tekoa who will advise David.
The wise woman of Abel advises Joab.
Bathsheba advises Solomon.

And this is the culture that will produce the book of Proverbs,
where the father tells his son to spend his life with Lady Wisdom.
And in the Song of Songs, the Bride sings to her friends about her Beloved.

In such a world, you ignore a woman’s voice at your peril.

(It’s important to note that the book of Samuel deals fairly with women’s flaws too –
Saul will consult a medium in a couple chapters,
which leads him to the house of Dame Folly!)

b’. David’s Blessing – Renounces Vengeance (v32-34)

³² *And David said to Abigail,*

And David blesses Abigail with a threefold blessing
(just as his message to Nabal had been a threefold shalom)

“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!

Abigail has reminded David that it is not his job to save himself!
He is called to deliver Israel – but not himself.

In matters pertaining to himself, he must wait upon the LORD for deliverance.

And David swears an oath that her words have been God’s agent:

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.”*

If she had not come, by morning he would have killed every one of Nabal’s wall-pissers
(yes, he uses the same language in front of a lady!).

The Calebites would be dead dogs by morning – if not for Abigail.

a’. The Gift Received (v35)

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.”*

David obeys Abigail.

Submission is not a one-way street.

When someone in a position of authority makes a bad decision,
then someone in a subordinate position needs to say something!

And the one in authority needs to obey the voice of the subordinate.

3. The Salvation of the LORD (v36-42)

a. Nabal’s Feast (v36)

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.*

So then Abigail goes home and finds her husband “feasting like a king.”

The anointed king is sitting in the wilderness,
while Nabal gets “very drunk.”

And so Abigail remains silent and waits for morning.

b. Wisdom's Words (v37)

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.

She waits until Nabal sobers up,
 (after all, she has discretion—she waits for the proper time—
 timing is everything when you are giving someone news they won't like!)
then she tells him of what she did,
 and he had a stroke or a heart attack – or something of the sort.
The word for “as a stone” is laban --Nabal spelled backward.

God turns Nabal upside down and backward.

c. The LORD's Action (v38)

38 And about ten days later the LORD struck Nabal, and he died.

Abigail's words accomplished what David's sword could not.
 But our author wants you to understand that Abigail did not kill her husband.
 She spoke the word of the LORD to him –
 but it was the LORD himself who struck Nabal.

If the fool had repented – and obeyed the voice of his wife –
 then her words would have brought life to the dead!

But the fool did not turn from his folly – and so he was turned upside down and backward.
 Nabal (the fool) became laban (as a stone).

b'. David's Blessing (v39)

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.

When David hears of this, he blesses the LORD for avenging him.
 We'll sing about this in Psalm 109.
Psalm 109 expresses the lessons that David learned in the wilderness.
 Vengeance belongs to God!
 That doesn't mean that vengeance is bad.
 Paul will say it this way in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8 –

“God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you,
 and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us,

when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire,
inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God
and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.”

Vengeance is a good thing, when you leave it in the hands of God alone!

And then David sends his servants to say, “okay, come be my wife,”
and Abigail says “sure.”

a'. Abigail Blessed (40-42)

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.

She does not say “oh, I just have to submit to him
and watch my whole household get slaughtered!”
She does what is right and God blesses her by striking down her husband
and giving her his anointed king as her new husband.

Conclusion: The Wives of David (v43-44)

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.

And at the end of the story we hear that David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel as a wife,
and that Saul had given his first wife, Michal, to Palti the son of Laish.

So what is this story doing here?

Nabal is a parable (or perhaps a parody) of Saul.
Saul isn't dying.

Saul's daughter Michal (David's wife) has been given to Palti the son of Laish.
But just as the fool, Nabal, dies—leaving all to David—
so also will Saul.
And so also will all of David's enemies.

The story of the death of Nabal is a sign of hope in the wilderness.
The death of Samuel is not the end of hope.
The death of the wise prophet and the death of the drunken fool
fit together in pointing forward to the glory of David.

Just as Abigail trusted that God would bless David,
and so she could entrust her future to the LORD's Messiah,
even so, you are to entrust yourself to Jesus!