

INTRO: Back in 1987, Sean Connery delivered an unforgettable line playing the character of Jim Malone in the movie *The Untouchables*: “They pull a knife, you pull a gun. They put one of yours in the hospital, you put one of theirs in the morgue. That’s the Chicago Way. And that’s how you get Capone.” I have to admit, I never actually saw that movie, but that quote is hard to miss in pop culture. Today it increasingly describes a vindictive culture that glamorizes violence for the sake of vengeance. But as much violence as there is in the OT, it’s never glamorized for the sake of personal vengeance. Last week in 1Sam 24 we saw David’s self-restraint because he trusted God’s vengeance. This morning in 1Sam 25 the point is God’s sovereign restraint of David’s foolish impulse to avenge himself on a fool, so that David doesn’t ruin his own rise to the throne or regret the way he gets there. **The Lord must restrain the foolish urges of his wisest servants to honor Jesus.**

Literary Context—1S 24-26 is like a 3-panel brochure on leaving vengeance to God. 1S 25 is the middle one dealing with Nabal, a power below David. The left and right panels deal with Saul, a power above David. The overall point of all of 1Sam 24-26 is David doesn’t avenge himself on anyone on his way to power. He rises righteously to the throne. **And in this center panel, all the glory for David’s self-restraint is attributed wholly to God’s sovereign restraint.** And that is as it should be—God’s glory at the center. So follow along in your Bible as I **read out loud 1Sam 25:1-44**. That’s a lot, so here’s a...

Plot Summary/Recap. David serves Nabal (25:1-8). Nabal snubs David (25:9-11). David seeks revenge (25:12-17). Abigail speaks restraint (25:18-31 intercedes). David stands down (25:32-35). God strikes Nabal (25:36-38). David sings praise (25:39a-b). David sends for Abigail (25:39b-44). And God is the one who is praised for all this. Abigail says in v.26 “*because the Lord has restrained you...*” David says in v.33 “*the Lord, the God of Israel, has restrained me...*,” and David praises God in v.39 *Blessed be the Lord who has avenged the insult I received at the hand of Nabal, and has kept back his servant from wrongdoing.*” God is the one who restrained David’s foolishness through Abigail’s wisdom.¹

Structural Integrity. Yet within that plot, we see an ongoing contrast between Nabal’s foolishness and Abigail’s wisdom, which David obeys. The text is best structured on this wisdom/foolishness axis because the text introduces the main characters based on that specific contrast in v.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.*” The only wise thing in Nabal’s life is his wife. He is a fool married to a wise woman. That’s how the text frames itself. So that’s how the sermon is framed: **FIVE CONTRASTS BETWEEN WISDOM AND FOOLISHNESS**

1. WISDOM REFRAINS FROM SELFISHNESS; FOOLISHNESS RATIONALIZES IT (25:1-16)

The whole scene opens with the note that Samuel died. Why? Samuel was the one who prophesied both Saul’s demise and David’s rise. The rest of this story proves that it’s not Samuel that’s key to David’s success. It’s God’s word, still powerful after Samuel’s death, that’s key to David’s rise. God’s prophetic word lives on, whether Samuel lives or dies.²

¹ “Though he had spared Saul and had repaid him good for evil (1Sam 24:17), David on this occasion has no second thought about incurring blood-guilt” (Baldwin, TOTC 160). “David must extend the restraint he showed to Saul to Nabal as well...In chapter 24, therefore, David saw clearly what he must, or rather, must not, do; in chapter 25 he does not see it at all” (D.R. Davis, FOTB 261). “Yahweh rescues his servants from their own stupidity, ...restrains them from executing their sinful purposes, ...sometimes he graciously and firmly intercepts us on the road to folly” (D.R. Davis, 260).

² “David continues to experience Yahweh’s favor without Samuel...Samuel also offered David a point of security (19:18), security no longer available. Yet the authority of Samuel’s word as Yahweh’s word (3:19-4:1a), a word that announced both Saul’s loss of the throne and David’s status as Yahweh’s anointed, continues to shelter David. By keeping David from his own latent violence, this narrative demonstrates that Yahweh’s word continues to resolve itself, even when the one who announced it has died” (Firth, AOTC, 266).

As David keeps running from Saul, he goes to the wilderness of Paran, outside the town of Carmel. And the first thing we learn of Nabal is not his name, but his reputation and character. He was “very rich”, just like Abraham is described in Gen 13:2. For comparison, Nabal’s 3000 sheep is in the same atmosphere as Job’s 7k, and Job was “*the greatest man of the east*” (Job 1:3). By that measure, Nabal is the top 1%. This is not just Fortune 500. This is Fortune 50. Nabal is in the same tax bracket as the ANE Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates, Elon Musk, Steve Jobs, Mark Zuckerberg. Nabal is big oil, big tech, big pharma...big fleece. And he is Abrahamically blessed, not only with sheep but with a beautiful and wise wife (Gen 12:11). Yet there Nabal’s similarities with Abraham end, because “*the man was harsh and badly behaved.*” He was also “*a Calebite.*” That may be the only explanation for how such a boorish man had gotten so rich—God had blessed him for the sake of his faithful forefather Caleb. But the apple had fallen pretty far from the tree. Still, he’s got plenty to spare, and David’s 600 soldiers are hungry.³

So in vv.4-8 when David hears Nabal is shearing his sheep, he sees an opening. Sheep shearing happened twice a year, and was usually celebrated with a feast. Yet instead of stealing, he apparently tells his 600 men to offer their services as a private security detail for Nabal’s shepherds and shearers in the wilderness, since there were always poachers other criminal threats between towns. That’s why he can send 10 guys to Nabal asking if he can spare a few sheep for dinner. We were 600 armed, but did your shepherds no wrong, and even defended them. Nabal’s own guy says in v.16 “*they were a wall to us*” and David reflects in v.21 “*I guarded all that this fellow has in the wilderness,*” and all Nabal had was a whole lot. David sending 10 guys may have been a request for a formal covenant, or it may have just been requesting one-time payment for services rendered. Whatever the case, his point is “we could have cleaned you out ourselves; instead we did you a solid, we watched your six. So, how about a little something for the trouble?” “*Peace to you, peace to your house, peace to all you have.*” The subtext is, you’re welcome. You have me and my 600 to thank for keeping that peace. So how about a little thank you? And when he says “*I hear you have shearers,*” plural, that’s probably a subtle reminder to Nabal of how rich he is and how much he has to spare. You have so many sheep you hire out the shearing. So surely a few sheep for me and the fellas wouldn’t put a guy like you in the red, right?

Wisdom refrained from selfishness. David **didn’t exploit** his power to steal what he wanted or even needed. He didn’t break the eighth command by stealing Nabal’s stuff, even though the set up might make you think that Nabal is such a bad rich guy that he deserves for David to steal his stuff. Instead, David kept the 8th command by protecting Nabal’s stuff. First he provided a service, then he asked for whatever Nabal could spare.⁴ David didn’t exploit his advantages for illegal profit. He used his advantage for Nabal’s advantage, hoping for legal profit. In this, David anticipates Jesus, who did not consider equality with God something to be exploited to his own advantage, but he humbled himself and became obedient, even to death on a cross (Phil 2).⁵ David doesn’t let appetite or need rationalize selfishness or theft. Nor does he let any sense of entitlement as the anointed heir to the throne get the better of him. That shadow is in the shape of **Jesus**, who in his own wilderness temptation refused to turn stones into bread to prove himself the son of God. David will not thieve or manipulate his way to the throne. He wants to get there the right way (at least for now). Nabal is not as noble. Look there in vv.9-11.

Foolishness rationalizes selfishness (25:1-3, 9-11). David’s servants say all that, in David’s name no less, yet Nabal makes them wait for an answer. It’s hard to tell, but he may make them wait to kinda show

³ Nabal is a Calebite, and thus a member of a prominent regional clan. The clan was centred (*sic*) on Hebron, the city initially given to Caleb (Josh 15:13), “and it would be in Hebron that David established his initial kingdom (2Sam 2:1-4). But Nabal is rich, surly and a man with powerful connections” (Firth, AOTC, 267).

⁴ “David the good shepherd of sheep is shown to be a vigilant shepherd of shepherds also.... The image presented here is that of a leader who is demonstrably fit to ‘shepherd’ the Lord’s people” (Bergen, NAC 247).

⁵ Of course, sending 10 armed guys to make the ask might also send a non-verbal message.

them how little he cares about them. Some theologians also relate his delay to disobeying the command not to withhold wages from a hired man in Lev 19:13. Granted, Nabal didn't hire David, but David has rendered services, and Nabal is selfish enough to want something for nothing. At any rate, Nabal takes his sweet time getting back to David's men, and when he finally gets around to them, he basically asks "Who does David think he is? From my perspective he's nothing more than a low-level functionary in Saul's administration who's gone rogue with a militia, in which case I'd be aiding and abetting a fugitive. You never know who you're dealing with these days. It's too risky for my blood. I don't borrow trouble. Besides, this is a business decision, a stewardship issue even. I've got my own mouths to feed, I have to make payroll. Plus, I earned everything I've got. This is my bread, my water, my meat, that I killed for my shearers. You wonder when Nabal last read **Dt 8:17** in his quiet time, "*Beware lest you say in our heart, my power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth. You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth....*" For that matter, you wonder when Nabal last had a quiet time period. Yet his rationale for selfishness seems strangely 21st century, doesn't it? Protestant work ethic, private property, risk aversion, concern for the bottom line, all sanitized with a concern to make payroll. So much for showing hospitality without grumbling.

He goes on. "You think I'm supposed to part with my hard earned wealth for...who exactly...some waif with his ragtag band of brothers from who knows where? I don't think so." Now that's curious. Nabal's servant will know who David is by name, and Nabal's wife Abigail will recognize David's name without any further description at all. Yet Nabal asks "who is David" and says David comes "*from I do not know where.*" Come on, man. That's a little too rich. Nabal knows who David is. Nabal is from Maon. David was just in Maon in 23:24 playing cat and mouse with Saul. And of course the new power ballad about David killing his 10,000's had been playing on radio stations from Gilead to Gath as recently as chapter 21. Nabal knows who David is and even where David is from—he calls him the son of Jesse as a put down, just like Saul used to do. Nabal knows David; Nabal just refuses to recognize him.⁶ Nabal thinks it would be foolish to share with David. What's foolish is Nabal's own rationalized, self-absorbed refusal to recognize and serve David as anointed heir to the throne. How often foolishness masquerades as wisdom.

Isn't that how they treated Jesus? "Don't we know his family? Isn't he the carpenter's son?" And they despised him. "*David sent messengers out of the wilderness to greet our master, and he railed at them.*" That's how all Israel treated the prophets according to Jesus, "Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!" (Mt 23:37). Jesus warned his apostles of the same thing before he sent them out in **Matt 10:14-15**. "*If anyone will not receive your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town.*" And what is Jesus solution? "*Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.*" Don't take your own vengeance. Trust it to God's. And still today, there's this kind of sanctimonious skepticism, a reticent rationalism about Jesus. Do we really even know who He is? How can I devote my life to such a murky figure from the past? There's a lot of religious cooks out there. It'd be naïve to believe. I'd be on the wrong side of history." Yet what's truly foolish is not to recognize Jesus for the king He is. You know who Jesus is, friend. You just don't want to recognize him for it, because you're afraid it will cost you too much of what you enjoy.

Well, Nabal isn't the only one who can rationalize selfishness. Two can play at that game. As soon as David hears Nabal's response, he loses it. The first thing out of his mouth is "*Every man strap on his sword....*" And his army has been waiting for those words. "*And every man of them strapped on his sword. David also strapped on his sword.*" Sword, sword, sword. That's David's solution. He doesn't

⁶ This might be because "Carmel is a site previously mentioned in connection with a monument Saul built to himself" in 15:12 (Bergen, NAC 245). That would mean Nabal has built his business under the shadow of Saul's statue to himself, a not-so-subtle reminder of Saul's power and of his minions observing and reporting everything anyone does to satisfy Saul's paranoia.

exactly take the time to articulate a careful rationale, but you can feel it. It's immediate, raw, visceral. He doesn't even think twice. He just boils over. David's "rationale" is rage; he's offended. "I don't have to create my reason. You've given me all the reason I need. You said no...to me. You want to return my good with evil? Then I'll return your evil with evil, and you will not live to regret it. You messed with the wrong Israelite. I played nice. You said no. No more Mr. Nice Guy. If you don't know who I am by now, then it's gonna be the last thing you learn. You don't say no to me. Gloves are off now. David wants a pound of flesh. That also is foolishness rationalizing selfishness. David is not above that, not in his own sinfulness. As much self-restraint as he has shown toward Saul, he lets a fool draw him into foolishness. Now what? What happens when the hero acts just like the villain?

2. FOOLISHNESS REJECTS COUNSEL (25:17, 19)

WISDOM REPENTS WITH COUNSEL (25:18-35)

Foolishness rejects counsel. In v.14, one of Nabal's servants realizes they're on the brink of violence, and he calls for help. And who does he call? Abigail. Why doesn't he go to Nabal directly? Because in 25:17 "he is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him." Nabal is not open to reason. You can't talk to that guy. That's also why Abigail cobbles together a sizeable meal for David and his men to meet their need and quell David' anger without telling her husband first. Ladies, don't get the wrong idea, here. This is not a biblical argument for spouses having separate and secret bank accounts. Abigail's situation is a problem, not a proof-text. Abigail doesn't tell her husband what she's doing, because nobody in the whole town can tell her husband anything at all. Nabal is so stupidly stubborn that Abigail has to resort to saving his life without telling him how she's gonna do it, otherwise he will run himself right into the tip of David's sword. And if we're honest, that's what we would have let happen if we were Abigail, without a single twinge of conscience to the contrary. Abigail is honoring her husband, because she is trying to save him from dying by his own stupid stubbornness. A dishonoring wife would do nothing at all that morning, packed his lunch as usual, and hoped he never made it back for dinner. She would have demurred him to death and worn white at the funeral. Wives should not be quick to emulate Abigail's hiding of her intentions from her husband, or to excuse their own subterfuge in marriage. But we also should not criticize Abigail as if she's being un-submissive in a marriage to an impossible man. She is honoring him as best she knows how, by trying to intercede for him with David in order to save her husband's sorry life. The wicked thing for her to do would be to knowingly let David's anger play out, to let David kill her sorry excuse of a husband, and justify her neglect as submission. But again, the point here is not to teach you about gender roles in marriage. The point is, what does wisdom do when its back is against a wall? Young couples, name your next daughter Abigail.

The fool rejects counsel. Nobody can tell Nabal anything. He is uncorrectable, incorrigible, and to make matters worse, he's filthy rich. I mean, Nabal's "wisdom" is working for him, right? He is THE MAN in Maon. He's the most successful business man for miles around. He doesn't need you. You need him, and he know it. So why should he listen to anybody? He's self-made. Yet the Bible calls him a fool, and apparently so did everybody else, because his name (probably) rhymed with fool.

Brother, sister, mark it well, if other people can't correct you; if you feel like everybody is wrong but you; if you are always criticizing, never encouraging; if you can always find a way to wiggle out of other people's rebukes or admonitions; if you can't find anyone who is godly enough to disciple you; if you can't find a church that's good enough for you; then you're the fool, not everybody else. Fools reject counsel. Wisdom is in the counsel of the many. Foolishness refuses to be corrected by anyone but Jesus Himself. Foolishness rationalizes the rejection of all human counsel because, well, my way works, or I'm better than they are, or they don't understand, or they're sinners too, or whatever. Young Christian, you will keep calling your own foolishness wisdom if you keep rejecting counsel from people who have been walking with the Lord longer and more faithfully and graciously than you. Examine yourself. Can other people speak correction to you? Or are you always the one doing all the correcting?

Wisdom listens long to counsel (25:23-31). “In direct contrast to Nabal’s foolishness—“*one cannot speak to him*”—Abigail asks David in v.24 “*Please let your servant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your servant.*” And then Abigail speaks the longest uninterrupted direct discourse of any woman in the whole OT.⁷ And guess who listens to the whole thing all the way through without interrupting her? The man anointed king of God’s kingdom. This is not a violation of complementarianism either. It is an extreme situation. She takes a humble posture—falls at his feet like David did before Saul. She takes blame for her own husband’s foolish guilt in v.24. She doesn’t throw Nabal under the bus. She throws herself under the bus. Abigail is the Christ-type! She takes Nabal’s guilt.⁸ She interposes herself in Nabal’s place and intercedes for him. She is the wise one who volunteers to take the place and punishment of the fool to save his life before the King. She admits Nabal’s foolishness, but she pleads David’s forgiveness in Nabal’s stead. She casts herself as David’s servant, not his teacher. She pleads God’s promise to David “*For the Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house,*” echoing God’s promise all the way back in 2:35, and anticipating the Davidic Covenant in 2Sam 7. She respects David’s godliness, “*because my lord is fighting the battles of the Lord.*” She assumes the best in David “*And evil shall not be found in you so long as you live.*” She assigns him to God’s care in the bundle of the living. She encourages him to hope in God’s future grace for his success. And she is concerned for him to have a clear conscience when he looks back on his path to the throne, “*my lord shall have no cause of grief or pangs of conscience for having shed blood without cause.*” Women, take a page from Abigail’s book. Abigail is neither blunt nor disrespectful. She is tactful, yet she is not demur to a fault. She pleads for the life of her worthless husband, she takes the guilt for his foolishness on herself, and she pleads HIS case with utmost humility and respect to the king. That is Christ-like, feminine wisdom. And it is beautiful. It is so beautiful, in fact, that David finds it irresistible, and takes correction from her counsel.

Wisdom takes correction from counsel (25:32-35)⁹ Just immediately as David strapped on his sword, he now immediately praises God for restraining him from violence through Abigail’s godly corrective counsel. And just as the narrative mentioned the sword three times, now David himself says “Blessed” three times. *Blessed be the Lord... Blessed be your discretion... Blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from working salvation with my own hand.*” Blessing replaces bloodshed and vengeance. David admits that God has used Abigail to restrain him. And God had to do it, or else not even Abigail would have made it out alive. “God has restrained me from hurting you, [and] unless you had hurried and come to meet me, truly by morning there had not been left to Nabal so much as one male.” I did not see this on my own, but it was pointed out to me that that is basically David admitting that if it weren’t for Abigail, David would have done to Maon what Saul did to priestly town of Nob—he would have killed at least every man in town. David has his own foolishness, doesn’t he? Yet it was his wisdom not only to hear Abigail’s counsel, but to heed it. “See, I have obeyed your voice.” This is in direct contrast to Nabal’s foolishness as “*such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him.*” Not only can you speak to David. David will obey you. And this he takes, from a woman pleading mercy for the fool she married. **App:** Husband, if you cannot listen to and receive respectful correction from your wife, you are no David. You are a Nabal. If you married your wife because you thought you could always argue her into agreeing with you, because you could win every argument and never have to take correction from

⁷ So also R.D. Bergen, who counts it at “153 Hebrew words” (NAC 249).

⁸ In v.23, “*’ap...means ‘anger’... Abigail not only interposes herself before David; she does so specifically before his anger*” (Firth, AOTC, 264). “By taking responsibility for his actions, she effectively became a martyr in behalf of her churlish husband” (Bergen, 250).

⁹ “A lesser man than David would have scorned the pleas of Abigail and persevered with his own preconceived course of action” (Baldwin, TOTC 164) “As Polzin notes, this providential intervention sharpened the contrast between David and Saul: David spared the clan of those who offended him, but Saul wiped the clan out that offended him (cf. ch. 21)” (Bergen, 251).

her, you have been a Nabal. David is a **correctable king**. Brother, are you correctable at home and at work? Can anybody tell you anything?

3. FOOLISHNESS REWARDS GOOD WITH EVIL (Nabal 25:12-17)

WISDOM REWARDS GOOD WITH INTIMACY (David 25:21-22)

Foolishness rewards good with evil. Nabal rewarded David's good with evil. That was foolish. And it is exactly how the world treated Jesus, and still treats him. Jesus had to say to his critics "*I have shown you many good works; for which of these do you condemn me?*" (John 10:32). The puritan pastor Samuel Crossman from the 1600's captured it perfectly in two verses from his hymn *My Song is Love Unknown*. "Sometimes they strew his way, and his sweet praises sing; resounding all the day hosannas to their king: then 'crucify' is all their breath, and for his death they thirst and cry. Why, what hath my Lord done? What makes this rage and spite? He made the lame to run, He gave the blind their sight. Sweet injuries! Yet they at these, themselves displease, and 'gainst him rise."¹⁰ Oh friend, what is there in Jesus to criticize? What evil or infidelity, what dishonesty or greed or impurity? How has Jesus ever done you wrong? Yet you would reward his good with evil, with unbelief, and you would call that wisdom. That's the essence of foolishness. Do not reward Jesus' good with wicked unbelief. By contrast....

Wisdom rewards good with intimacy. By the end of the narrative, Nabal is dead by God's own hand, David is avenged yet still innocent, and he has Abigail to thank for it. So in v.39 "David sent and spoke to Abigail, to take her as his wife." Now, we should not immediately or overly spiritualize this. Nabal was likely the wealthiest Calebite in the region, and his wife is now a widow. This is not mere romanticism, nor is it just David doing the right thing. David stands to gain an estate from this marriage, as most interpreters agree. Abigail comes with quite a dowry, and marrying her gives David political connections in Hebron that he will later use to set up his capital there. Marriages in the ANE were very much like marriages in Victorian England. You didn't just marry for love. You married to make political and economic connections that profited your own family. So this marriage to Abigail, and also David's marriage to Ahinoam of Jezreel, gave David political and economic connections that helped him when his time came to rule. This is also why Saul gives his daughter Michal to someone else, when he should have given her to David for defeating Goliath. Saul is using Michal as a political pawn to separate their houses because of his jealousy toward David. So we can still affirm that the Bible teaches that marriage is one man to one woman covenanting for life, while seeing David as a political man of his political times with political marriages. We will also have plenty of reason in 2Samuel to point out that marriage to multiple women with concubines galore is not what it's cracked up to be.¹¹ Wisdom marries one wife, not two.

Still, David's marriage to Abigail certainly rewards the good she did him with personal intimacy, which in turn illustrates the principle that *The secret of the Lord is with those who fear him* (Ps 25:14). And this carries over to the NT when Jesus Himself says in John 15 "*If you keep my commands you will remain in my love,*" and "*You are my friends if you do what I command.*" Wisdom fears God and obeys Jesus, and both the Father and the son reward obedience and loyalty with intimacy.¹² So Christian, if you are not as close to the Lord as you'd like, consider whether you are as wise to obey him as you ought to be.

4. FOOLISHNESS REJOICES IN RICHES (36)

WISDOM REJOICES IN GOD'S FAITHFULNESS (of reward v.28; of vengeance v36-38)

¹⁰ Quoted from *Hymns of Grace* (L.A: Master's Press, 2015), #202.

¹¹ The marriages here are "politically astute" (D. Firth, AOTC 266). "Marrying Nabal's widow gave David legitimate claim to Nabal's position and wealth (*cf.* 2Sam 12:8; 16:21-22) and thus probably was of strategic importance in David's later rise to power in Hebron (2Sam 2:4), a town in the vicinity of Carmel" (R.D. Bergen, NAC 253). So also J. Baldwin: "...at this period to marry the wife or concubine of a ruler was to make a bid for his status and power (2Sam 3:6-11; 16:21-23; 1Kgs 2:21-22). David, by the same principle, had a right to the estates of Nabal to which his new wife entitled him..." (TOTC 163).

¹² Perhaps Eph 5:22-31 is a Christo-telic direction, except that Jesus marries one bride, not two, as David does here.

Foolishness Rejoices in Riches. In v.36, once Abigail has secured David’s mercy for Nabal, she goes to tell him. But this time it’s not his stubbornness that’s makes him impossible to confront. It’s his drinking problem. He’s drunk himself silly at his sheep-shearing party. This is what Nabal is about—big business, big profit, big parties to celebrate big profits. That’s what made Nabal’s heart happy within him. So when he sobers up the next morning, she goes in to tell him how close David came to jacking him up, and it literally scares him stiff, because ten days later he’s dead.

But the text leaves you in no doubt about why Nabal died. It reports the results of the spiritual autopsy. “*The Lord struck Nabal, and he died.*” That was not impersonal karma, or what goes around comes around. It was not the universe giving Nabal his due, or moral cause and effect. It was the personal vengeance of the personal God on Nabal’s person. That party would be Nabal’s last hurrah, and he had no idea that night that ten days later he would be dead to the world facing God’s everlasting wrath in Hell.¹³

Is this not how many people are living today, all around you? Maybe this is you yourself. Modern life for many is about big profits and big parties to celebrate big profits. Everybody’s workin’ for the weekend. Make money. Get rich. Get plastered. Play it on a loop. And of course, that makes sense if Jesus did not rise from the dead. The apostle Paul said it himself, “*If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die’*” (1Cor 15:33). That was Nabal’s worldview; but he is foolishness personified. Not much has changed since then. “*Should 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?*” Me and mine, and to hell with everybody else, if there is a hell. Non-Christian, that may describe you right now. Be careful you don’t end up like Nabal. It doesn’t have to be that way. But you have to be correctable. You have to hear biblical counsel and repent at it. You can’t just be a hearer of God’s word. You have to become a doer of it, otherwise your faith without works will remain as dead as Nabal. Jesus said of the man who stored up all his treasure in banks and barns, “*You fool, this very night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.*” (Luke 12:20-21) By contrast....

Wisdom Rejoices in God’s Faithfulness (reward v.28; vengeance, vv.36-28). David’s restraint showed that he rejoiced at the prospect of God’s reward for his obedience in v.28. “*The Lord will certainly make my Lord a sure house, because my lord is fighting the battles of THE Lord, and evil shall not e found in you so long as you live.*” And in the same way, for the same reasons—for the joy set before him, Jesus endured the cross despising the shame, and therefore he is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb 12:2). And we are now bidden to “*consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.*” We now look not to David’s endurance, but to Great David’s Greater Son, to Jesus as the author and finisher of our faith, who looked forward to the reward of obedience. Brothers and sisters, Jesus himself promised us, “*There is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many*

¹³ “The comparison of Nabal’s feast to a royal feast deliberately invites the reader to make a comparison of Nabal to Saul. Such a comparison reveals significant similarities. Both were socially powerful individuals who were members of wealthy families; both had benefited from David’s actions, yet both acted hostilely against David; both had female clan members who married David and acted to help him avoid a personal catastrophe; both had their lives spared by David. And as the narrative will later show, both died under God’s judgment” (Bergen, NAC 251-252). “Nabal means ‘fool’ (in the sense of moral obtuseness), so the obviously ink is that he is characterized by folly (*nebālā*) (for the wordplay, see Isa 32:5-6). But *nebel* can mean ‘wineskin’ (see 25:18), and though a cognate form *nebēlā* is not attested, it may refer to one marked by wine (see 25:36). Finally, the root *nbl* can refer to something dropped, and its cognate noun *nebēlā* means ‘corpse’, which is what Nabal finally becomes. There is a host of wordplays, and each is evident in the ensuing narrative” (Firth, AOTC, 270). “the irony is that Nabal refused to serve an anointed king while showing royal pretensions” (Firth, 271).

times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life” (Lk 18:29-30). Perseverance in this life is rooted in reward in the life to come. And yet it is also rooted in trusting God’s vengeance on those who mistreat us for righteousness in God and loyalty to Jesus.

Here again, David praises God, not only for his mercy, but for his vengeance. Verse 39 “*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.*” That is praiseworthy. God will either judge the wicked in Jesus, or he will judge them in themselves. And that is both righteous and praiseworthy. The martyrs in heaven ask in Rev 6:10 “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth? And they get their answer in Revelation 19 as we saw last week.... Yet even here, we follow Jesus’ example, not only as he looked forward to the reward, but also as he kept entrusting himself to the one who judges righteously, while he himself suffered the unrighteous condemnation of others, for others. David is still learning his lesson here in 1Sam 25. He is not allowed to take vengeance himself. But that’s ok. He can trust God to do that for him. Maybe we still need to learn that too. And it will be worth it, because foolishness regrets its ways, whereas wisdom regrets nothing.

5. FOOLISHNESS REGRETS ITS WAYS (37-38). WISDOM REGRETS NOTHING (25:30-31)

Wisdom waits for God’s vengeance without regret. Foolishness suffers God’s vengeance with regret. Nabal suffers the symbolic price for rejecting God’s ultimate anointed Christ, Jesus. He did not live to regret it in time. But he certainly regrets it in eternity. It is not David who made Nabal pay. God did that. And in the same way, it is not Christians who can make anyone regret, much less pay for, any injustice we suffer. We are not allowed to do that. We trust that to God, because that’s what Jesus did in his own life, suffering, and death.... David took Abigail’s counsel, and just as she said in v.31, David “*had no cause of grief or pangs of conscience for having shed blood without cause or for... working salvation himself.*” And he himself admits it in v.39 that God, through Abigail, “*has kept back his servant from wrongdoing.*” **The Lord restrained the foolish urge of his wise servant to honor Jesus.** David was ready to do a wrong he would have regretted. Instead, he listens to godly counsel, repents when he hears it, and regrets nothing. Christian, whatever it is you are suffering at home, at work, in the neighborhood, or in the public square for your loyalty to Jesus, be wise; retaliation is regrettable, and it is not Christ-like.

Our Lord Jesus submitted to death, even death on a cross. Therefore God highly exalted him over all rule and authority and gave him the name above all names. **As David proved himself the legitimate king of God’s kingdom, so Jesus has proven Himself the legitimate king of God’s kingdom. He rose to His throne not by abusing his own power, but by suffering the abuse of other people’s power. He waited for God’s vengeance, even while he suffered it Himself for the sins of all those who would ever repent and trust in Him.** The Risen Christ has zero regret for continuing to entrust himself to the One who judges righteously. Neither will you. Let’s pray together.¹⁴

¹⁴ The Gospel According to Abigail. Jesus came speaking peace to those far off and peace to those near (25:6; Eph 2). Humanity snubbed the Son of David as Nabal snubbed David. God rightly avenges our rejection of His Son. Jesus intercedes for all his trusting people as Abigail interceded for Nabal’s house. God avenges. We praise. Jesus sends for his bride the church.