

Beauty and Two Beasts

The Singer, Part 7

1 Samuel 25:1-44

In Pat Riley's book that recounted his basketball coaching career, he told the story of the rather infamous 1981 basketball season of the Los Angeles Lakers.

The year before they had won the World Championship and they were considered the favorite to win again that year. Within weeks of their season opener, their star player, Magic Johnson, tore a cartilage in his knee and was out for three-months.

The other players dug in though, played their hearts out and stuck with it and, to the surprise of many, won more than 70% of their next games. At the end of three months, the return of Magic Johnson was in every newspaper and on every sportscaster's comments. Publicity grew exponentially as he date drew new. The hard work of the current players was overlooked. All of their achievements were ignored as the spotlight swung to Magic Johnson. The players began growing resentful and jealous. The stadium sold out on the night of Magic's first appearance back on the court. The ovation has he was introduced was long and loud.

That night, however, the Lakers nearly lost the game to a far inferior team. It wasn't long before the players turned on each other; the morale of the entire team collapsed; the coach was fired and the Lakers lost their opening game in the play-offs. Riley wrote, "Because of pettiness and resentment, we executed one of the fastest falls from grace in NBA history. And then he coined a phrase as he wrote, It was all because of the Disease of Me.¹

When you come to the end of 1 Samuel 24, you are amazed at the humility and patience and self-control of David.

He has the king surrounded – it would be an easy kill – and yet David refuses to take his revenge against King Saul.

The very next chapter is the exact opposite reaction. In this conflict, David's temper not only boils over, it turns into potential murder.

Only this time, it isn't the King of Israel, it's a wealthy rancher named Nabal.

You're about to see one of the fastest falls from grace in the early life of David.

And if there's a lesson in the very beginning to underscore it would simply be, victories won today will still be temptations to fight again tomorrow.

Chapter 25 opens with a funeral. David's beloved friend and mentor, Samuel, the godly prophet and priest of Israel, has died.

Everyone gathers to pay their respects to this hero of faith.

I was tempted to preach today on this verse only – but since our study is on the biography of David and not of Samuel, we'll move along.

But let's at least pause long enough for taps to play; let's stop and recognize the passing:

- of this spiritual warrior;
- the last of the judges;
- the priest who had been given to God by his godly mother some 80 years earlier;
- this founder of the school of the prophets;
- this king-maker who had dethroned Saul and anointed David, mentoring him in the ways of faith and trust.

This past summer, Marsha and I traveled to California where I would speak at Mt. Hermon Conference Center for the week.

Dave and Lucy Burggraff traveled with us for several days and showed us the highlights of San Francisco, Lombard Street, Big Sur, the Golden Gate Bridge, and my favorite, Muir Woods where we walked through a redwood forest.

Some of these massive trees were more than 2,000 years old. So tall you couldn't see the top and so big you would need a dozen people to surround one of them.

One tree had fallen earlier in the summer, and one of the placards said that the sound of the impact of that tree falling could be heard from miles away.

The old prophet was gone.

The impact of his death would have reverberated throughout the entire nation. Everyone who could come came, including David and his mighty men.

As you read the last line of *verse 1*, you can almost feel the sadness, perhaps even emptiness of how David must have felt. ***Then David rose and went down to the wilderness of Paran.***

Now what?

David's spiritual leader was gone . . . the anchor of Israel had died.

If there was ever a time for David to become impatient . . . or sad, perhaps even doubting his next step, it would be now.

He had no idea that his next form of prophetic encouragement would come from the lips of an unappreciated, godly woman.

Three characters play out these next few scenes in chapter 25.

The first character – and character is the right word for this guy – appears in *verse 2*. ***And there was a man in Maon whose business was in Carmel. The man was very rich (how rich?) he had 3,000 sheep and a thousand goats.***

The Hebrew word for *rich* can be translated *heavy*. In our vernacular we would say, he was loaded.

In our culture, he would have lived on an estate with a mansion and a 5 car garage. His five garages would have housed, a Bentley, a Mercedes Sport Coupe, a Lamborghini, a Ferrari and, best of all, a Chevy Pick-up.

Now the problem with Nabal wasn't that he was rich; the problem was he was absolutely godless.

Nabal means fool; some Old Testament scholars think this might have been a nickname instead of a proper name.

Keep in mind that the word nabal/fool, doesn't refer to an intellectual dummy – it refers to person

who says, The fool says in his heart – there is no – what? – God.

Which is especially tragic, given the fact that the latter part of *verse 3* informs us he's a descendant of Caleb – the great pioneer of faith who served with Joshua.

This descendant of Caleb knows nothing of the character and faith of his forefather.

His description only gets worse – the latter part of *verse 3* further describes Nabal as ***harsh and badly behaved*** – (you could render that – ***evil in his dealings***).

In other words, Nabal was demanding and deceptive.ⁱⁱ

His word was no good and his handshake meant nothing.

Later on in verse 17, his own servants describe him as a ***worthless man who will not listen to anyone.***

Put all this together and this guy is a wealthy, crusty, out-for-himself, cheat-you-outta your last dime, unaccountable, unkind, harsh, cleverly deceptive, arrogant old man.

He would be the kind of guy who would lean back in his chair and tell you how he pulled himself up by his own bootstraps – how he made it to the top of the ladder by his own ingenuity . . . how he had become a successful self-made man.

Listen, the world is full of Nabals. They are proud, godless, deceitful, self-made men.

They are fools in designer clothing.

There couldn't have been a more mismatched couple than Nabal and his wife. She's described in *verse 3* – ***notice the middle part – and the name of his wife was Abigail. The woman was discerning and beautiful, but the man was harsh and evil in his dealings.***

She was discerning – you could translate that, she had outstanding insight.ⁱⁱⁱ

From what she will later testify to David, we know she loved God as much as her husband rebelled against God; Abigail loved her people as much as Nabal loved himself.

She was spiritually wise and Nabal was spiritually blind.

I agree with F.B. Meyer who wrote a hundred years ago that is remarkable how many Abigails get married to Nabals. God-fearing, tender and gentle in their sensibilities, high-minded and noble in their ideals, they become tied in union with men for whom they have no true affinity.^{iv}

He also wrote that, in Abigail's case, their relationship would have been an arranged marriage – she more than likely came into his home as a young woman, bound to the man of her father's choosing.

Nonetheless, she would make her husband and her home all the more holy by her sanctifying presence and influence.

But we can only imagine the volume that could have been written by Abigail. A volume of tears and internal suffering; married to a brutish, arrogant man who had to have his way; a deceitful man who often embarrassed, if not mortified her own desires to be honest and charitable and kind.

I have been aware as a pastor over these years of many women like Abigail.

One woman in particular several years ago who would be beaten if she attended church without her husband; she demonstrated incredible insight and patience and discernment in dealing with him; on one occasion she came and asked for prayer so that she might wisely approach her husband with a request to attend some special meetings we were having in the church.

She was married to a fool.

I wonder how many wives in the evangelical church at large have to discreetly give money to the offerings of the church – or to special mission's projects – how many women suffer silently because they love the Lord as much as their husbands love their career path . . . their toys and their games and their life.

How many women have insight . . . and their husbands are spiritually blind.

They are living out the exhortation of the Apostle Paul who commended believing women with husbands who either didn't believe or acted as if they didn't – and yet they sanctify their home and bless their husbands and their children more than they could ever realize with their biblical insight and spiritual dedication and godly commitment.

Now with that as a backdrop, here comes the crisis.

Notice verse 4. David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep. 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. 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."

By the way, notice what one of the shepherds confirms to Abigail down in *verse 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.**

Here's what's happened.

Roving bands of rustlers would steal from flocks and herds, making the life of a shepherd all the more dangerous.

But not when David and his men were around, which speaks volumes of their character. This wasn't blackmail.^v

It was typical for farmers and ranchers to tip the waiter, so to speak, and give to those who'd provided protection for their shepherds and their flocks.^{vi}

They had performed a service for Nabal and now it was payday.^{vii}

And sheep shearing was a time of celebration – David has waited for the most positive and advantageous moment to ask Nabal to provide food for his men.

Notice Nabal's rather shocking reply – *verse 10*. **And Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse?**

In other words, 'who does he think he is?' Notice this stinging accusation – There are many servants these days who are breaking away from their masters.

That alone is fighting words.

Nabal insinuates that David has rebelled against his master Saul and is just roaming around the country side with his good-for-nothing men.

This is a scathing response.

Notice 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?

Notice his repeated use of my – this is my bread – my water – my meat – my shearers.

It's all about I, me and mine.

He is terribly afflicted with the disease of me.

And he's denying David and his men even bread and water.

When Nabal says here, “I don’t know where you come from”; that’s simply another way of saying, “David, you and your men mean nothing to me.”

“If you took care of my shepherds, well, tough luck; I didn’t tell you to do that . . . and I couldn’t care less about the lot of you.

Which by the way has political overtones. Nabal is effectively denying David the respect and honor due this king-elect.

If you want to know how much Nabal actually knew about David – just listen to his wife – look over at *verse 28b*. ***For the Lord will certainly make my lord (David) a sure house...*** That phrase, *a sure house*, refers to a royal dynasty.

She knew that David had been appointed by God to sit on the throne as the prince of Israel . . . she knew that God will give David’s house a lasting dynasty.

And that’s how much Nabal knew too.

But Nabal effectively says, “You’re a nobody and I’m not going to pay you what I ought to because you and your men are nothing more than a band of renegades and ruffians.”

Notice verse 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 o his sword. David also strapped on his sword. And about four hundred men went up after David, while two hundred remained with the baggage – or – back to guard the camp.

Now if you’re wondering what David plans on doing, it isn’t negotiating. He’s not carrying a peace pipe.

Look down at *verse 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 as 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.”***

In other words, David and his men are going to slaughter this fool and all his descendants.

David has a right to be angry . . . but he doesn’t have a right to murder anybody.^{viii}

Isn’t it interesting that he knew he had no right to take vengeance in his own hands against Saul – even when Saul had attempted to kill him 3 times – but now he’s ready to chop off heads because he didn’t get a dozen sheep and some wineskins as payment

for bunking down with Nabal’s shepherds and keeping them safe?

But keep in mind – David doesn’t have a right to murder anybody, but he does have a right to be angry.

Be slow to anger (James 1:19) means that sometimes you can get angry – and for the right reason and with the right intention.

Maybe you can identify here with David.

You’ve been cheated. You shook hands and kept your word – you even went above and beyond the call of duty – you worked hard and somebody forgot to pay you or notice you or reward you.

Even worse:

- Your kindness was returned with harshness;
- Your service was intentionally overlooked;
- Your motives were misrepresented;
- Your patience and self-sacrifice went unrewarded.^{ix}

You were expecting to be paid a promotion . . . a pay raise . . . or maybe just a compliment . . .

You tried to do a simple good deed for somebody and it backfired. The lady you helped across the street hit you over the head with her umbrella for walking too fast.

One pastor wrote of one such deed in his recent article on gratitude; he wrote, “A man was writing at the post office counter when he was approached by an older man who held a post card in his hand. The old man said, “Would you mind addressing this post card for me?” The young man gladly did so; he further agreed to write a short message on the post card the older man dictated it to him. He even signed the man’s name for him at the bottom. Finally, the younger man kindly said, “Is there anything else I can do for you?” The older man looked at the post card, thought for a moment and then said, “Well, yes, at the bottom here would you write, P.S. Please excuse the sloppy handwriting.”

Well, thank you so much.

I clipped this news article some time ago – the Denver Post ran it – two teenage girls decided to skip the school activity and bake cookies for their neighbors. After baking the cookies, the girls set out late that evening. They only brought the fresh-baked goods to houses with the lights on. They knocked on the door of one home and the 49 year old woman inside didn’t answer the door – but instead complained to authorities the next day that the girls

caused her to suffer anxiety. After a trip to the emergency room the next day, the woman sued them – and eventually won. The girls had to pay the \$900 dollars to cover the emergency room visit. The woman told a reporter she hoped the girls had learned their lesson.^x

What lesson? Avoid that really weird neighbor?! I suppose they learned *that* lesson.

Of course, for David, this isn't about post cards and cookies – the stakes are so much higher . . . but it still isn't worth reacting with the rage that now consumes him.

He now has a really bad case of the Disease of Me.

One of the household members informs Abigail that David is marching toward their home to murder Nabal and every male related to him or even, implied, working for him.

Notice verse 18. Then Abigail made haste and took two hundred loaves and two skins of wine and five sheep already prepared and 30 quarts of parched grain and a hundred clusters of raisins and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on donkeys.

This is the original catering business. And is she good or what?

Notice verse 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 knows that he'd never allow her to go – he'd never understand. Diplomacy and Nabal never went together in the same sentence.

But David is about to commit a crime and Abigail understands the significance of it all.

She will deliver a speech to David that is one of the most incredible, insightful, clever, tactful speeches recorded in scripture.

She's obviously praying as she travels toward David. And keep in mind, David is dead wrong.

He's muttering under his breath, "Surely in vain I've guarded all this man had in the wilderness . . . how dare he reproach me and my men . . . how dare he return our kindness with evil."

Stop for a moment along this path.

Think about it; David has passed some really big tests in life – with flying colors.

- Attempts on his life didn't anger him;
- The loss of his wife didn't embitter him;
- A treacherous, deceptive King couldn't stop his singing;

He entrusted it all to God and wrote some bestselling songs about leaving the vindication of his

character and even the provisions of life in the hands of God.

And now an egotistical sheep herder insults him and he's ready for murder.

He's handled some big tests in life . . . now he's stumbling over a lesser test of his character.

Alan Redpath wrote in his commentary here – you have overcome great temptation by the grace of God; you have stood your ground against some fierce onslaught only to trip up at some pin prick that got under your skin; no spiritual triumph in your life can guarantee you will resist temptation the next time it appears.^{xi}

The truth is, temptation is always changing clothes – it's always adapting to new strategies.

Let me outline Abigail's incredibly discerning comments by giving them contemporary titles. She literally steps in between these two beasts.

You could call this chapter Beauty and Two Beasts. And Abigail will deliver 5 points in this speech of a lifetime.

1. The first thing she effectively says to David is, "Don't stoop to a lower level."

Notice verse 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, "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.

That's another way of saying, "David, look, before you strike back, consider the source." What do you expect from a foolish man, but foolish words and actions?

Nabal is acting like Nabal . . . don't get down in the gutter with him . . . don't stoop to his level.

2. Secondly, Abigail effectively says, "Don't take matters into your own hands."

Notice verse 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 . . .

Abigail gently and yet passionately reminds David that this action is uncharacteristic of him . . .

everyone knows he's left his future in the hands of God. They're already singing his songs.

David, don't take matters into your own hands.

3. Thirdly, Abigail says, **Don't diminish your high calling.**

I love this reminder – *verse 28. Please forgive the trespass of your servant. For the Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the Lord.*

In other words, David, you're battling the Philistines . . . you're even now acting as protector of the people of God.

What are you doing going to kill a foolish sheep-herder?

Stick to fighting the battles with which the Lord is honored.

What a great reminder for us, church. Our battle is spiritual; we fight for the souls of men and women. We're not fighting for creature comforts; we're not battling for the respect of our culture; we're not living for a conservative resurgence or hoping Jesus will come back because our neighbors don't like us.

If you haven't noticed, we have returned to the idolatry of Ephesus and the immorality of Corinth and the hatred of the Roman Empire.

The battle that is won by prayer is the discipling of believers; the sound teaching of scripture and the advancement of the gospel.

What are you doing messing around with fools like Nabal – he's simply living up to his name.

Don't diminish your high calling. Stay the course and focus on the gospel.

4. Fourthly, Abigail wisely yet courageously cuts to the heart of David's sinful intentions by saying, **“Don't play the part of God.”**

Notice verse 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.

This is brilliant – it's both convicting and encouraging to David at the same time.

She uses two expressions that are loaded with subtle meaning.

In their culture, they would bundle up their jewelry in cloth before taking a journey in order to protect their treasure.

Abigail is reminding David that God has him wrapped up in a bundle and is caring for him . . . as if to say, “David, God will take care of you . . . let God do what God can do.”

And then she ever so kindly she reminds him of his greatest moment when God's power shone through him - when he ran at that giant Goliath with a sling and a stone.

Notice here, David, God can take care of all of your enemies in just the same way He used you to take out Goliath.

So, what are you doing strapping on a sword? This isn't the way God takes care of things . . . don't play the part of God.

Don't stoop to a lower level

Don't take matters into your own hands

Don't diminish your high calling

Don't play the part of God.

One more – and this is the finale to her amazing speech.

5. Abigail says, **“And David . . . don't forget your future role”**

Look at verse 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 life taking vengeance himself. And when the Lord has dealt well with my lord, then remember your servant.

David, don't sully your royal robes of tomorrow with the blood of revenge today.

David – you're angry about today – Abigail knew that – and she acknowledged his anger. But she then said, - just don't forget about tomorrow!

Which is wonderful advice to every New Testament Christian – Paul knew he was writing Christians who were being mistreated, defrauded, ignored, marginalized . . . he writes, “Don't forget, one day you shall judge the angels.” (*1 Corinthians 6:3*)

Is justice dead in your life circumstances? Have you struggled with the fact that the scales aren't balanced like they're supposed to be? It doesn't seem fair.

Don't forget tomorrow . . . one day God will allow you to balance them . . . and you shall reign with Him in justice and equity and truth.

And here's another implication and insight from Abigail – you don't treat people a certain way because of who *they* are – we treat them that way because of who *you* are.

David, you're heading for the throne of Israel – you are the crown prince.

And who are *you*, beloved?

You are followers of the Son of David – slandered by Israel's leaders; mocked concerning His birth to an unmarried woman; disciples were denigrated as nobodies; He is denied His rightful place as King.

And He endured the worst of it with joy. How? He knew His future – don't forget yours.

Don't forget yours . . . and this ***light affliction you face will soon give way to great glory (2 Corinthians 4:17).***

You, sir, are a crown prince . . . you, ma'am are a crown princess . . . your future awaits you in the

courtroom of the King of Kings. Your robes have already been sized.

Now let me summarize the rest of this chapter:

David responds with humility, transparency and admission to his vengeful spirit and returns back to his wilderness hideout.

Abigail return home to find her husband drunk at the festival; she waits and then tells him all that happened the next morning – when he hears the news of his brush with certain death; o his wife's actions to rescue the household; he literally has a heart attack and collapses; 10 days later God takes his life in judgment.

David hears the news; comes back and asks the president of this catering company to marry him . . . and she says yes.

Imagine that . . . he married the woman who straightened him out.

And all the women said, "Amen!"

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 2/16/2014 by Stephen Davey.

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i Robert J. Morgan, Nelson's Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations & Quotes (Thomas Nelson, 2000), p. 634

ii Charles R. Swindoll, David: A Man of Passion and Destiny (Word Publishing, 1997), p. 96

iii Ralph W. Klein, Word Biblical Commentary: Volume 13 (Word Books, 1983), p. 243

iv F.B. Meyer, David: Shepherd, Psalmist, King (Christian Literature Crusade, reprinted 1973), p. 106

v William G. Bellshaw, I Samuel: Better Than Sacrifice (Regular Baptist Press, 1976), p. 104

vi Adapted from Swindoll, p. 97

vii J. Carl Laney, First & Second Samuel (Moody Press, 1982), p. 72

viii Bellshaw, p. 104

ix Alan Redpath, The Making of a Man of God (Revell, 1962), p. 106

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xi Adapted from Redpath, p. 107