A Woman’s Wisdom

1 Samuel 25

I have no dream or deep desire
To be a hot house plant that blooms
With preening pride, with flame and fire,

But only in wide, windowed rooms
Where all can wonder and exclaim
My petals are like peacock’s plumes.

I’d rather shun such fleeting fame
And bloom in secret in the shade,
Without renown, without acclaim.

A dew drenched lilac in a glade
Perfumes the air like altar smoke.
For only closet prayers we’ve prayed

Or whispered words in kindness spoke
Can soothe a soul like Heaven’s choir
And give men Life time can’t revoke.

It was more than a mountaintop experience or a dream come true. It was a stunning, spiritual victory.

Beside the yawning mouth of a desert cave, David heard Saul say the words he longed to hear. You are more righteous than I; for you have dealt well with me, while I have dealt wickedly with you...Now, behold, I know that you will surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hand. 1 Samuel 24:17,20

David was elated as he watched Saul lead his army back down the mountain trail to Gibeah. But beyond every mountain of victory is a valley of testing. And that test began with sad news.

Samuel died; and all Israel gathered together and mourned for him, and buried him at his house in Ramah. Verse 1

David knew better than anyone how moody and malicious Saul could be. And if anyone could control him, Samuel could.

But now the old prophet was dead. When Saul turned stormy again, who would restrain him? The one man in all of Israel who could stand between Saul and David was gone.

So David quietly slipped away and led his little army further into the Judean desert. And David arose and went down to the wilderness of Paran. Verse 1

Paran was a parched pastureland where sheep and goats grazed on wiry desert grass. And there, David and his men found a profession of sorts. They spent their time protecting shepherds from bedouin bandits and Philistine raiders.
It was there in the open, desert rangeland that David was tested.

**The Provocation to Sin**

The test came in the form a man named Nabal. He was a sheep farmer with a godly heritage. But he was nothing at all like his ancient ancestor Caleb.

*Now there was a man in Maon whose business was in Carmel; and the man was very rich, and he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats...the man was harsh and evil in his dealings, and he was a Calebite, Verses 2,3*  
Nabal was a wealthy man. But his greatest blessing was his wife. Her name was Abigail. She was beautiful, godly and wise.

*...the man’s name was Nabal, and his wife’s name was Abigail. And the woman was intelligent and beautiful in appearance, Verse 3*  
However, in spite of all his earthly blessings and advantages in life, Nabal consistently lived up to his name. The word means fool.

But in Hebrew it has a deeper meaning than we might see at first glance. It suggests one who is insensible to the claims both of God and man: someone who is sinful, self-centered and surly.

David’s great test came when it was time to shear the sheep. For long months he and his men had guarded Nabal’s shepherds. And in all that time, those shepherds had not lost a single lamb.

David had every right to demand payment for his protection. But he did not. Instead, he commanded his men to remind the farmer about all their captain had done him.

*...your shepherds have been with us and we have not insulted them, nor have they missed anything all the days they were in Carmel. Ask your young men and they will tell you. Therefore let my young men find favor in your eyes, for we have come on a festive day. Please give whatever you find at hand to your servants and to your son David. Verses 7-8*  
Nabal’s sneering response lived up to his name. He returned David’s formal salutation and faithful service with disdain and scorn.

*Nabal answered David’s servants and said, “Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants today who are each breaking away from his master. Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men whose origin I do not know?” Verses 10-11*  
There is a familiar ring to those words. They remind us another Nabal: a man our Master mentioned in a parable. That man had a preoccupation with words like I and me and my, too.

*...he began reasoning to himself, saying, “What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?” Then he said, “This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry’” Luke 12:17-19*  
Nabal was a lot like the wealthy fool in Jesus’ parable. He was living a life that was wanton and wasted, self-centered and shallow, waiting to be plunged into eternal darkness and everlasting death.

David understood that. So the way he reacted to Nabal’s rebuff is surprising.

*David said to his men, “Each of you gird on his sword...Surely in vain I have guarded all that this man has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him; and*
he has returned me evil for good. May God do so to the enemies of David, and more also, if by morning I leave as much as one male of any who belong to him.” Verses 13,21-22

At Engedi, David spared the life of a man who hated and hunted him. But at Maon, he was willing to slaughter a foolish farmer and all his servants merely because that man insulted him.

That was the test David failed. He failed because of what he forgot. And if we forget those things, we will fail, too.

The Promise for Servants

Nabal was a fool. But his wife was not. So when a servant told her what her husband had done, she set out to make things right. She started by supplying much more than what Nabal had refused to give.

Abigail hurried and took two hundred loaves of bread and two jugs of wine and five sheep already prepared and five measures of roasted grain and a hundred clusters of raisins and two hundred cakes of figs, and loaded them on donkeys. Verse 18

She sent the supplies with servants in a long line of pack mules. She followed along behind them. And she met David coming through a pass in the mountains.

When Abigail saw David, she hurried and dismounted from her donkey, and fell on her face before David and bowed herself to the ground. She fell at his feet and said, “On me alone, my lord, be the blame. And please let your maidservant speak to you, and listen to the words of your maidservant.” Verses 23-24

When Samuel died, David fled. But he did not have to. He was just as safe when the old prophet was dead as he was when Samuel was alive. Circumstance has nothing to do with safety.

Samuel was not the one who appointed and anointed David. God did! And when David praised with the prophets at Naioth, God is the one who protected him. That was the message Abigail delivered.

Should anyone rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, then the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living with the Lord your God; but the lives of your enemies He will sling out as from the hollow of a sling. Verse 29

David was on the run. But he did not really need to be. As long as he was in the center of God’s will, he had nothing to fear.

That is why we dare not respond to situations or react to circumstances. Instead, we must determine to both believe and act upon the truth of God’s Word. And nothing else.

God sent Abigail to remind David that his sovereign Lord was still in charge. And though men might search for him and slander him, they would not succeed.

David was safe because God had a plan for his life. He had promised the son of Jesse he would rule as king over all Israel.

David was a great and godly man. But he came to the very brink of committing a terrible sin. And he did so because he stopped living only and always by the infallible truth of God’s Word.

Strength, safety and stability always reside in believing and obeying God’s Word. To forget that is to flirt with failure.

The Purpose of Service

This is a story of stark contrasts. It contrasts David’s reactions to Saul and to Nabal. It contrasts
David’s honor with Nabal’s foolishness. And it contrasts David’s words with Abigail’s.

*David had said, “Surely in vain I have guarded all that this man has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him; and he has returned me evil for good.” Verse 21*

Now let this gift which your maidservant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who accompany my lord. Please forgive the transgression of your maidservant; for the Lord will certainly make for my lord an enduring house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the Lord, and evil will not be found in you all your days. Verses 27-28

At some point after he fled to the desert rangeland of Paran, David started doing the right things for the wrong reasons. God did not call and commission David to protect Nabal’s herdsmen so he and his men might be well paid.

Just as it was everywhere else he went. David’s purpose at Paran was to serve the Lord he loved. And if Nabal did not pay him for it or even appreciate what David did, that did not matter.

It would not have made any difference if the wealthy farmer had paid David with glittering gold and gave a banquet in his honor. Neither righteous regard nor rude rejections had anything to do with the reason why David was to protect the shepherds of Maon.

Abigail was right. David was there to fight the Lord’s battles, not his own. And so are we.

It is harsh reality everyone who would serve the Savior must face. All too often, just like David was, we will repay with evil and ugliness for the good we do.

Our prayers and piety, our sacrifices and service will not be appreciated. In fact, much of the time, they will not even be noticed.

There will even be times when people will malign and mistreat us when we have been honorable and selfless. But that is alright.

For those who love and live for the Lord Jesus, there is only one payday that matters. It is for that day that every saint lives and labors, sacrifices and serves.

*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*

2 Corinthians 5:10

Everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ will stand before Him when He judges the saints. And in that hour, He will remember our every midnight prayer and selfless sacrifice.

But we will not stand there seeking renown or regard, let alone crowns or thrones. Both now and then, all any Christian craves is to hear our loving Lord say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

When we forget that, we cannot help but be filled with despair and disappointment. Worse yet, when we are repaid for our labors with unkind words instead of gratitude, we can become so discouraged we are tempted to stop serving and sacrificing.

That is the trap we fall into when we labor for any other reward than our Redeemer’s honor and appreciation.

It is the trap David fell into. And one we must avoid at all costs.

*The Price of Sin*

God’s standards for those who serve Him never have changed and never will. And both Jesus and Paul explained how our Lord expects those who love Him to respond to evil, ugliness and unkindness.
I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Luke 6:27-28
See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people. 1 Thessalonians 5:15
God’s Word is definite. Our Savior expects His servants to respond righteously when they are mistreated
But David was ready to leave Nabal’s hillside farm littered with broken, bloody bodies, just as Saul drenched the city of the priests with blood. And in his mind, he was justified in doing so.
Nabal was not only stingy and self-centered. He was arrogant and rude. And he not only refused to pay David’s men for their selfless service. He added insults and disdain to his rejection.
Overcome with anger and emotion, God’s anointed king was about to act against everything he had believed and lived for since he was a simple shepherd on his father’s farm. And that is a great error.
It took the wisdom of a wise woman to remind David that, as the Lord’s anointed, he must be pure.
And when the Lord does for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and appoints you ruler over Israel, this will not cause grief or a troubled heart to my lord, both by having shed blood without cause and by my lord having avenged himself. Verses 30-31
David was about to commit a serious sin. He was not only about to hack Nabal to bloody bits. He was ready to slaughter all of that foolish farmer’s servants, too. And they had done nothing at all.
There is great danger in acting out of anger or overpowering emotions. The damage we do is not for a moment or even a season.
Abigail had no doubt that David would one day sit on the throne as king over all Israel. She knew enough about him to know he was a good and godly man, too.
Nabal’s beautiful wife also knew the sin he was about to commit that day would not fade into the mists of memory. Even as king he would be haunted by what he did.
The things we do and the words we say in a moment of passion are over in an instant. But the terrible results of sin linger on in a harvest of bitterness and sorrow. That is why Paul gave saints as Ephesus a simple yet stern command.
In your anger do not sin... Ephesians 4:26 (NIV)
Abigail knew what David forgot. He did not need to avenge himself.
Now therefore, my lord, as the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, since the Lord has restrained you from shedding blood, and from avenging yourself by your own hand, now then let your enemies and those who seek evil against my lord, be as Nabal. Verse 26
David did not have to fight against his enemies. In fact, he had no right to avenge himself. Only God has that right of retribution.
“Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. Romans 12:19
The foolish farmer did not know it. But he only had eleven days left to live. In the end, David turned back from committing sin. And no matter how we are provoked, we must do the same.