

7. Where our hearts are

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[0 : 00] Now, we're going to turn to our Bibles and to the first book of Samuel, chapter 25. This is continuing the series on David, God's flawed but faithful servant.

And as we've often done in this series on David, we've got a long passage, so we're going to read part of it and sing a hymn and then read the second part. So, 1 Samuel 25, it's on page 247.

David is still in exile, still a fugitive, hunted by his enemies. Now Samuel died, and all Israel assembled and mourned for him, and they buried him in his house at Ramah.

Then David rose and went down to the wilderness of Paran. And there was a man in Maun whose business was in Carmel. The man was very rich. He had 3,000 sheep and 1,000 goats.

He was shearing his sheep in Carmel. 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.

[1 : 15] He was a Calebite. 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. 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.

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.

When David's young men came, they said all this to Nabal in the name of David, and then they waited. And Nabal answered David's servant, Who is David?

Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants these days who are breaking away from their masters. 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?

[2 : 29] So David's young men turned away and came back and told him all this. And David said to his men, And every man strap on his sword, and every man of them strapped on his sword.

David also strapped on his sword. And about 400 men went up after David, while 200 remained with the baggage. 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.

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, so long as we went with them. They were a wall to us, both by night and day, all the while we were with them, keeping the sheep.

Now, therefore, know this, and consider what you should do. For harm is determined against our master, and against all his house. And Nabal is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him.

Then Abigail made haste, and took 200 loaves, and two skins of wine, and five sheep already prepared, and five sears of parched grain, and a hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on donkeys.

[3 : 46] And she said to her young men, Go on before me, behold, I come after you. But she did not tell her husband Nabal. Now she rode on the donkey, and came down under cover of the mountain.

Behold, David and his men came down towards her, and she met them. 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.

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.

When Abigail saw David, she hurried and got down from the donkey, and fell before David on her face, and bowed to the ground. 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. Let not my lord regard this worthless fellow Nabal, for as his name is, so is he.

[4 : 53] 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. Now then, my lord, as the lord lives, and as your soul lives, because the lord has restrained you from blood guilt, and from saving with your own hands, now then, let your enemies and those who seek to do evil to my lord be as Nabal.

And now, let this present that your servant has brought to my lord be given, to the young men who follow my lord. 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, and evil shall not be found in you so long as you live.

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. In the lives of your enemies, he shall sling out as from the hollow of a sling.

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, my lord shall have no cause of grief, or pangs of conscience, or having shed blood without cause, or my lord taking vengeance himself.

And when the lord has dealt well with my lord, then remember your servant. And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the lord, the god of Israel, who has sent you this day to meet me.

[6 : 28] Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you who have kept me this day from blood guilt, and from avenging myself with my own hand. 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 this morning I have been not left to Nabal so much as one male.

Then David received from her hand what she had brought him. He said to her, Go up in peace to your house. See, I have obeyed your voice, and I have granted your petition.

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. 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 like stone.

And about ten days later, the lord struck Nabal, and he died. 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, has kept back his servant from wrongdoing.

[7 : 50] 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, and 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. 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.

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. David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel, and both of them became his wives.

Saul had given Michal, his daughter, David's wife, to Paltz, the son of Laish, who was of Galim. Amen. That is the word of the Lord. May he bless it to us.

Now, could we have our Bibles open, please, at page 247, and we'll have a moment of prayer. Our Father, as we turn from the praising of your name, to the preaching of your word, we pray indeed that you will open our hearts and minds to that living word, and that you will open that living word to our hearts and minds, as we pray in the name of the living word, Christ Jesus himself.

[9 : 18] Amen. Amen. Amen. Many years ago, I had a book called First Names First, which, like many, another book has gone astray over the years, and I haven't seen it for a long time.

This book was written by a man called Leslie Dunkling, and he says in the preface, the reason he became so interested in names was because he had such a bizarre name, Dunkling.

Now, with a name like File, I can feel very sympathetic. Those of you who are called Smith and Jones, thank the Lord for it. You won't have to spell your name on the phone or anything like that.

You won't have to put up with misspellings. Now, this is a chapter about names, and the meaning of names, first of all. Nabal, the fool, the boor, the churlish individual, Abigail, which means that her father's delight.

You can imagine a fond father as he looked on this little scrap of humanity coming into the world, giving it that name, Abigail. And then, of course, the name that rings through this chapter as it rings through the book, indeed, as it rings down the scriptures, the name of the Lord's anointed, David himself.

[10 : 42] Now, just a word about the actual story in chapter 25. It's a very long story and a very well told one. David, still a fugitive and outlaw in the desert of Judah.

Hopes were food and shelter from this man, Nabal, who was a wealthy landowner. And in verse 21 and following, we find that Nabal actually owed David food and shelter because David's men had guarded him and his wealth from bandits.

But Nabal contemptuously refused this request and David intended to react with force. But Abigail, Nabal's beautiful and shrewd wife, intervenes and she herself sends to David the help that her husband had refused to send.

Nabal dies after a drunken orgy and then David marries Abigail. Now, is that all? It's a good story, but as we've noticed over and over again in the stories of David, while they are good stories, while they must be read as stories, or we must enjoy them as stories, there's much more to it than that.

I think the clue is in verse 3. Look at verse 3. Now the name of the man was Nabal, the name of his wife Abigail. The woman was discerning and beautiful, but the man was harsh and badly behaved.

[12 : 09] He was a Calebite. It's awfully unfortunate that because Caleb, the ancestor of the Calebites, is one of the most attractive characters in scripture, but obviously by this time the Calebites have become a byword for pride and greed and so on.

But, it's not altogether obvious in the English translation, but what it actually says is this. The woman was good and beautiful and the man was evil.

Good and evil. This is what this story is going to be about. Basic good and evil. Back to the creation story. What God makes is good.

What rebels against God is evil. So, in other words, this story is a story about basic choices between good and evil. Basic choices between what is right and what is wrong.

And the word occurs, verse 21, evil for good. verse 26, Nabal doing evil. Verse 29, David prevented from doing evil.

[13 : 16] It's a story about good and evil and where do good and evil begin? They begin in the heart, do they not? This story harks back to a much earlier story.

1 Samuel 16. Humans look on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart. That's why I'm calling the sermon this evening, Where Our Hearts Are.

What defines us? What is our heartland, if you like? That's what this story is about. It's a story about heart. And we sung about that in some of our hymns.

Lord, give a pure and loving heart to feel and know the love of our heart. But just one other point before we launch into the story. Look at the very beginning of the chapter.

Now Samuel died. Here is the end of an era. This great figure whose call had been told back in 1 Samuel 3, when as a boy he had served in the temple and heard the master's voice and obeyed the master's voice, his heart was in tune with the master's.

[14 : 25] He had stopped the rot in the kingdom. Read the last chapter of the book of Judges and see how deep the rot had gone. Samuel, by his powerful, by his godly, by his heartfelt ministry, had stopped that rot and paved the way for the emergence of David.

And you notice the universal respect. All Israel assembled and mourned for him. They buried him in his house in Ramah. But, as Wesley said, God buries his workers and carries on his work.

You may remember a few weeks ago, God had already sent to David when he was in the stronghold of Adullam, Gad the prophet to guide him. And later on, Nathan is going to emerge as a power in David's court.

And yet, this story is a powerful reminder that nothing seems to have happened as a result of the anointing back in 1 Samuel 16. David is still a fugitive and he's still obviously the object of contempt and ill treatment by those who feel they're superior to him, like Nabal.

Now, you'll notice the story's largely carried on by dialogue. It's kind of playlet, almost. So, we'll concentrate on the characters. When you're reading the story, you've got to look at the sweep of the story, you've got to look at the characters.

[15 : 48] So, first of all, in this story, which is about where our hearts are, we're going to look at the cold heart of a foolish man. It's the first thing I want to talk about, the cold heart of a foolish man.

Now, it's interesting that Saul is absent in this story. He's only mentioned in verse 44, but it's very clear that Nabal is a kind of surrogate Saul.

All this is a suggestion here, this is the kind of man who comes to prominence in a kingdom ruled by Saul. Saul. And, you notice, verse 29, Nabal, verse 29, sorry, not verse 29, verse, never been any good at figures, much better than the original text, so there are no numbers at all.

As his name is, so is he, and that's down at verse, somebody shouted out to me. Thank you very much.

Verse 25, yes, as his name is, so is he. Nabal by name, and Nabal by nature. Now, Nabal, of course, means fool or boor.

[17 : 08] Now, I can hardly believe even the most dim-witted or malevolent parents would call their son a little fool or a little boor. But, that's to miss the point.

N-B-L is the name in Hebrew. In Hebrew there are no vowels, and you can put other vowels into this, which should make it mean something like musician, guitarist, player of the lute.

So they probably imagined they had sired a little Beethoven, and hopefully they were no longer around to see the kind of person he had turned out to be. But the important thing about him is he is a fool in the biblical sense.

And what is a fool in the biblical sense? Psalm 14, the fool has said in his heart, there is no God. The fool is one who looks out at the world, looks out at life, and says, no God, or else perhaps says, well, there is a God, but it's me.

Nabal, totally self-centered. And look back at verse 2 now. He is totally defined by his possessions. before we get his name, we are told he is very wealthy.

[18 : 20] Now, he's like that other rich fool that the Lord Jesus Christ spoke about in Luke 11, the one who said, I'll pull down my barns, I'll build greater, and I'll say to my soul, I'll say to my heart, you have much goods laid up for many years.

In other words, the rich fool is saying, this is what life is about. Life is about riches, life is about possessions, life is about wealth, life is about what we own. This was Nabal, and Jesus said, so is the one who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.

And he dies, as a fool dies. Verse 36 to 38, I've got it right this time, Abigail came to Nabal, and behold, he was holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king.

He dies in his wealth. He, we'll come back to that, holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king.

King Nabal, in his own empire, in his own kingdom, doesn't need to worry about anybody else, certainly does not need to worry about God. He's made it, he's rich, he's possessed with great goods, and has need of nothing.

[19 : 43] Now, he is further defined by his attitude and by his behaviour. Look at verse 10, his contempt. And Nabal ends, who is David? Who is the son of Jesse?

Now, even if David had been a nobody, even if Nabal had never heard of him, that's no way to treat people. After all, we do betray ourselves often by our attitudes to people, particularly people we think are inferior to ourselves.

And this is Nabal. And verse 17, he is described as a worthless man. Now, worthless, of course, means much the same as fool.

A worthless man is somebody whose life really amount to nothing. What is written on Nabal's tombstone? Worthless. Fool.

That's dreadfully sad. Now, the faults of greed and discourtesy and pride are not unforgivable. That's important.

[20 : 46] Like Saul, Nabal is not condemned for his sins, but he's condemned because his heart is set on his sins. His security is built on his wealth.

He's condemned because he has a heart that will not change. That is what defines Nabal. In fact, look at verse 37. In the morning, when the wine had gone out of Nabal, his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him.

He became like a stone. It doesn't mean a medical thing, but I'm sure it's much more than a medical thing. It's a whole psychological thing. His heart became as a stone.

Look at verse 38. the Lord struck Nabal. Now, if you put these two things together, it's very interesting. Nabal had said, essentially, I am the master of my fate.

I am the captain of my soul. I rule the roost. The Lord says, well, there's a consequence of it when it happens. Remember the terrible words of Romans 1.

[21 : 54] God gave them over. They had decided, not just they, we had decided to rebel against God. And if we continue in that rebellion, our heart remains hard as a stone, then God will judge us.

God will say, that's what you want, and that's what you'll get. It's a terrible story. He dies, and what does all his wealth amount to?

What does all his status amount to? It amounts to nothing. Now, secondly, let's look at the generous heart of a wise woman. And we'll come back again to verse 3.

The word is discerning and beautiful. Now, discerning, as I said, is the word good. The word that appears at the very beginning of our Bibles and right through as well.

This is a reminder of personal responsibility. Abigail could have said, I've got an absolute boor of a husband. I don't see why I should bother. I don't see why I should be any different.

[22 : 57] That's not the point. The point is we, each of us, have an individual responsibility. She kept her dignity. She kept her generosity, although in spite of her husband.

Was there a time, perhaps, when Nabal was young and daring and dashing and she had been attracted by him? Or, perhaps, in the world of a time, she had no choice.

Perhaps her father saw this. Here's a great chance, married to a wealthy landowner. There's going to be a great marriage, ignoring probably Nabal's behavior and Nabal's attitude.

But her heart was not cold and dead like her husband's. Her heart was profoundly different. You can read a portrait of somebody like her in Proverbs 31, the virtuous woman, the excellent wife of Proverbs 31.

This is Abigail. And notice how she inspires loyalty. Verses 14 to 18, one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife.

[24 : 06] Abigail suggests the stratagem that will avoid the anger of David. And notice, he's obviously very close to her. He talks about Nabal, verse 17, he is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him.

It's important to notice how often the humble and the nameless do great things in the kingdom of God. Read through the Bible and read these accounts. 2 Kings chapter 5, a little girl in Naaman's household, whose name we don't know, we don't know what happened to her afterwards, but she was the means of bringing her master, the great Syrian general, into contact with the prophet Elisha, and thereby causing his leprosy to be healed.

Paul's nephew in Acts 23, who saved Paul from an attack by his enemies. And it's important to remember the contribution of the humble and of the nameless, not just in biblical times, but in our time as well.

The many unnoticed things that will never be recognized in this world, but one day the Lord Jesus Christ will honor and own these as done for him.

So, she's wise, she's kind, she's diplomatic, but she has another function in this story. Because if you simply talk that way, you could easily become moralizing, don't be like Nabal, be like Abigail.

[25 : 39] Now, of course, we don't want to be like Nabal, we want to be like, that's not the main point the story is making. I want you to look at verses 18, well, first of all, verses 18 and following, and where Abigail comes to David, and particularly a bit further down, verse 25, Abigail says, let not my Lord regard this worthless fellow Nabal for his name is, so is he, Nabal is his name, Nabal is nature, if you like, but, and then she says, verse 26, now then, my Lord, as the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, because the Lord has restrained you from blood guilt, and from saving you with your own hand, Abigail is there to remind David who he is, and what the Lord has promised him.

Remember, this is the story of the Lord's anointed. We are not David, but we have David's God. But this is, she is reminding David who he is, and what his destiny is.

Verse, 30, when the Lord has done to my Lord, according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you, has appointed you prince over Israel.

How did Abigail know this? Because Abigail had an open heart. Now we can be pretty certain if Abigail knew this, Nabal knew it as well, which makes of course his words, who is David, who is the son of Jesse, not only contemptuous, but shows him trying to oppose the purpose of God.

So, Abigail saves David from a rash and ungodly move. And there's another little detail here. All the fascinating things about these biblical stories, little details that show us where the story is going.

[27 : 30] Verse 29, if men rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, this is what's been happening up to now, and this is what is going to continue to happen in 26 and 27.

The life of my Lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living. Fascinating phrase, this, 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.

It's impossible to imagine when David heard those words, his mind did not flash back to the valley of Elah, where he himself had slung the stone, and the giant Goliath had been felled.

And remember what David says in that story, I come to you in the name of Yahweh, the God of hosts whom you have defied. The victory is the Lord. So you see, it's a reminder to David, David, who brought you this far?

Who is going to bring you to your real destiny? It's the Lord himself. So we've got not just the hard and stony heart of a foolish man and the generous heart of a wise woman.

[28 : 41] That brings us on to the third thing, the troubled heart of the Lord's anointed, of David himself. Remember what I've called this series, David's God's flawed but faithful servant.

David had flaws. Indeed, David's flaws were in technicolor. David here is in danger of becoming like his enemies, isn't he?

In chapter 24, he refused the opportunity to kill Saul. In chapter 26, he's going to refuse that again. But here, he almost falls under the trap of killing Nabal and his sons, taking matters into his own hands.

Now, obviously, David is not perfect. That's why I talked about his troubled heart. But it's easy to see what he must have felt like.

I am never going to come to the throne. My enemies are persistent. And here's another one. Saul fades out of the picture and this poor Nabal fills the picture.

[29 : 54] I want you to notice two things about David here. First of all, David responds to the wisdom of Abigail. He is not a fool. Verse 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 head. And we know that's true because about ten days, it says in the previous verse 38, the Lord struck Nabal and he died.

That's a key verse. The Lord has kept back his servant. And once again, the word wrongdoing is the word evil. You see, David's heart is true to the Lord.

Long after David has gone and at the end, the disastrous end of his son Solomon's reign, we are told that Solomon's heart was not true to the Lord his God as the heart of his father David had been.

David committed appalling sins, made dreadful errors, but his heart was true to the Lord. But the second thing to notice about David, in case you think I'm being too generous to him, these words, this little bit at the end of the chapter, verse 40 to 44, David begins a dangerous slide into polygamy, taking more than one wife.

[31 : 34] Now, it's a fascinating thing. Nowhere in the Bible is there a verse that condemns polygamy, although it's impossible to reconcile with the one flesh of Genesis 2.

What the Bible does is it always shows the disastrous consequences of polygamy. This begins a road that's going to lead to 2 Samuel 11 and 12 and Uriah and Bathsheba.

David, David's heart here, although David's heart was true to the Lord, it wasn't true to the women who came into his life.

What is the, what's that saying to us? I'll say more about this next week, where it's a very important issue. What it's saying to us is only the Lord himself can be trusted to bring in the kingdom.

Not even the best servants can be fully trusted with that. Even the best servants are flawed. And that should remind us, that should give us caution in our evangelical celebrity culture.

[32 : 46] Evangelical, even among evangelicals, I was going to say even among evangelicals a celebrity culture. Perhaps I should say especially among evangelicals there is a celebrity culture.

And that's been vastly increased by blogs and internet and all the rest of it. We must not place servants of God on a pedestal.

Because if we do that, when they fail, then we're instantly going to kick them in the teeth. And we mustn't do that. Don't volunteer for the job of Messiah.

There isn't a vacancy. It's the Messiah himself who will bring in the kingdom. Not even his greatest servants. So what's our response to this story then?

There is a navel often lurking in our hearts, isn't there? What the letter of the Hebrews call the stubborn and unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

[33 : 46] Now, if you're not a Christian, don't harden your heart against the gospel. And if we are Christians, don't be stubborn and unwilling to change.

Because every time we are confronted with the word of God, that's a call for change, isn't it? One thing the word will never do is allow us to relax back into complacency and say we've made it.

There is a navel, a fool lurking in each one of us. And probably we need to hear that message tonight, don't we? There's another thing I want to say as I finish.

There may be others who are lacerating themselves with guilt. But every one who is proud and complacent, there's probably at least another one or another four or five, acutely conscious of our own flaws and our own failures.

And I want to finish with these great words of 1 John 3 20. Whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart and he knows all things.

[35 : 07] It's in the Lord and not in our own hearts that our security lies. Thanks be to God. Let's pray. Whenever our hearts condemn us, and Father, how often they do condemn us.

Sometimes rightly, but other times wrongly, with sins that you have forgiven, but we cannot forgive ourselves. souls. So, turn our hearts away from our fitful and divided faith to your great faithfulness, and give to us that reassurance, that comfort that comes from knowing that you are our Father, that we are your children.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.