

A Foolish Man, The good man about to do a foolish thing and the good woman God sent to intervene

Disclaimer: Material from this message was adapted in part from messages found on the Sermon Central website.

Sometime you wonder how foolish some people can be. Here is a sampling of warnings that can actually be found on some consumer products.

- On a Duraflame fireplace log: "Caution—Risk of Fire."
- On a Batman costume: "Warning: Cape does not enable user to fly."
- On a bottle of hair coloring: "Do not use as an ice cream topping."
- On a cardboard sun shield for a car: "Do not drive with sun shield in place"
- On a portable stroller: "Caution: Remove infant before folding for storage."

After reading today's story I want to add the following: **Warning, "Do not let one man's folly be the cause of your own folly."**

When Nabal, a very wealthy farmer, refused to help feed David's men, he became very angry and nearly retaliated in a way that would have marred his future reputation as king. Thankfully, the Lord sent a wise woman to intervene in the situation.

How would you feel if out of the kindness of your heart you spent the afternoon raking and bagging leaves for your neighbor who watched you do this, but when you knock on his door to ask for a drink of water, he tells you to get lost. I don't think you'd want to do anything kind for that guy ever again; in fact you might plan some very mean things to do to his property next Halloween.

In our story today, David is in a similar situation. After Samuel's death and burial, which he most likely did not attend, wanting to get even further away from Saul, David left Engedi and went down to the wilderness of Paran in the Sinai peninsula. But while he had been in Engedi, David and his men had protected the local shepherds and flocks of a very wealthy farmer named "Nabal" – both from outside thieves and from food raids by his own men. They had done this simply because it was the neighborly thing to do.

So, when it came time for Nabal to shear his sheep, David, having an army of six hundred men and their families to feed, thought he would ask the man for some provisions. It was customary at shearing time, like other harvest festivals, for wealthy landowners to share their wealth with those in need. So, David's request — especially in view of his protection of Nabal's flocks — was entirely appropriate.

David sent ten of his men to ask Nabal for food in his name. He told the men exactly what to say. They were to be respectful and polite in telling how they had protected Nabal's flocks and that he could verify this by asking his own shepherds. But Nabal responded:

"Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants today who are breaking away from their masters. Shall I take my bread and my water and the meat that I have butchered for my shearers, and give it to men who come from I do not know where?" (1 Samuel 25:10, 11)

Nabal not only refused David's request, he was rude to the men and scornful of David; accusing him of simply being just another runaway servant. Without getting too far ahead in our story, it is surprising then to note that to the contrary, Nabal's wife Abigail acknowledged David as being not only a wrongly pursued honorable servant of God but also as Israel's future king (vs. 28-30). So even back then they could have very politically divided households.

But if David's reputation and future was so well known among the working class, why then did Nabal dare to respond to David this way?

In verse 25 we learn that Nabal's name literally meant "fool." However, contrary to his name, Nabal was very rich, influential, and he had a beautiful wife. People who are wealthy, influential, and have a beautiful wife are not usually considered foolish. So, in what sense was Nabal a fool?

First, in the most obvious way, how he dealt with David was foolish in that it is not prudent to insult the person who has command of a private six-hundred man army. Even if he didn't respect David for who he was, he should at least fear him for the great harm he could do.

But Nabal was foolish at an even deeper level! Because, he believed that all his wealth had come from his own ability and efforts (*notice that six times in his refusal of David he used the words "I" and "my"*). Nabal had neither fear of nor respect for the Lord. Not only did he refuse to acknowledge God as the source of his success, neither did he honor God's commands to be generous with those blessings.

Nabal was not grateful to God, nor generous to his neighbors, and did not even show common decency to David. He had clearly benefited from David's presence and protection, but he wasn't about to give away any of his stuff. Nabal would have told you that *the rich don't get rich by giving it away*.

So David had every right to be angry. For years he has been fleeing from Saul's jealous pursuit; it was common folk like the priests of Nob who had protected and supplied him – sometimes at the cost of their own lives. So in a fit of rage, David ordered his men to strap on their swords, vowing that every last male in Nabal's household would be dead by morning.

We can understand David's reaction. In fact many would say it was normal. But was it? This was the same man who had showed such restraint in regard to King Saul. David even felt guilty just for cutting off a piece of Saul's robe. But now, David was so angry that he thought nothing of cutting off a whole household from the land of the living. If David had followed through with his plan, he would have been guilty of mass murder.

Which is why God intervened by sending an unlikely hero to remind David that even when others don't, he still should honor God by his actions and reactions. That person was Abigail, Nabal's wife. In contrast to Nabal's "*surliness*," she was described as "*intelligent and beautiful*."

How such a good woman got to be this foolish man's wife, who knows? It was probably a contract marriage; her folks were so happy to be getting a rich son-in-law. Or, perhaps in his

younger days Nabal had not been so foolish, so greedy; sadly greed is often a byproduct of too much success.

Nevertheless while remaining faithful to her husband it was obvious that Abigail also played a large part in contributing to his success; she clearly was the one in real charge of the farm. After Nabal rudely sent David's men away, it was to Abigail that the fearful workers came to help.

Unfortunately she had not been present when David's men came with their request. But when Abigail found out what her husband had said and learned from one of the servants that David was on his way to do something about it, she leapt into action. Quickly sending ahead enough food for David's men, she then followed to personally intercept David.

Abigail's heart must have been pounding when she came face to face with David and 400 of his men dressed for combat. Quickly dismounting her donkey and bowing low before him, she addressed David with great tact and wisdom; as if he was already the king of Israel. Abigail said ...

*My lord, do not take seriously this ill-natured fellow Nabal; for as his name is, so is he; ["fool"] is his name, and folly is with him; but I, your servant, did not see the young men of my lord, whom you sent. 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 as long as you live.** 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, for having shed blood without cause or for having saved himself. **And when the Lord has dealt well with my lord, then remember your servant.*** 1 Samuel 25:25, 28, 30, 31).

Notice that Abigail doesn't tell David he has no right to be angry; he does! Nabal had been arrogant and foolish. But what Abigail urges David to do is to control his anger by remembering two things:

1. he had been appointed to fight God's battles -- not his own -- against people like Nabal.
2. And when he became king, David would not want this senseless slaughter on his record, nor on his conscience.

Abigail was appealing to David to remember who he actually served and what he would one-day be: "a merciful king who trusts in the Lord, not as a hot head who must avenge every insult." Which is the same advice that the Apostle Paul gave to us.

If only we would remember these truths when we're about to be carried away by our anger! Like David, we will have to put up with people that make our blood boil. But it would be helpful if we remembered that we're not perfect either. We have done and perhaps continue to do things that make other people steaming mad.

When we are angry at others, we should also want to remember how the Apostle Paul said that our struggle is not against one another, but against the spiritual forces of this world (Ephesians 6). Our enemy is Satan and our own sinful nature that wants us to give full vent to our fury. But the Apostle James wrote:

"let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness." James 1:19-20

Unbridled anger can only lead to God's judgment against yourself.

But, because we struggle to control our anger, God in his mercy sends people like Abigail into our lives to speak calmly and help us consider a better way to deal with the situation; that is if like David, we will listen to God speaking through them.

Hear what else Abigail had to say to David,

If anyone should rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living under the care of the Lord your God; but the lives of your enemies He shall sling out as from the hollow of a sling.

(1 Samuel 25:29).

Abigail gives David a two-fold picture. First she reminds him that he doesn't have to fear Saul's hatred because God had "*bound David securely in the bundle of the living.*" Abigail wanted David to picture what he himself must have done countless times as a shepherd — bundling a lamb up in his arms close to his chest to protect it from some dangerous animal. "That's what God has done with you, David," Abigail asserted.

That's a beautiful image isn't it? You might not be in the habit of gathering a lamb to your chest, but it is what you parents do with your children, and your children love it! Why? Because there is no more secure feeling than being enfolded in the arms of Mom or Dad! And guess what? That's exactly what God has done with you through baptism. He scooped you into His hands and brought you close to His chest. That's where He holds you now and will do so into eternity.

Think of how unnecessary and really how foolish it is then for us to retaliate against others in rage. God will take care of us, and he will deal with those who really are a threat to us. That's what Abigail reminded David of with her second picture. She said, *but the lives of your enemies He shall sling out as from the hollow of a sling*" (1 Samuel 25:29b).

As a sling-shot expert, this was another picture David could appreciate. Any stone that David hurled from his sling was a stone that was probably never seen again, unless it hit its mark like it did with Goliath. "That's how God is going to deal with your enemies," Abigail was saying. "*He will cast them far away from you. But he will do it in his own time and in His own way. So David, let God be God, and leave everything up to Him, including dealing with my foolish husband!*"

Did Abigail's words hit the mark? Would David relent? Or would he walk over Abigail on his way to kill Nabal? Here was David's reply:

"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent you to meet me today! Blessed be your good sense, and blessed be you, who have kept me today from blood-guilt and from avenging myself by my own hand!" (1 Samuel 25:32, 33).

This was the humble and calm David once again. He knew Abigail was right, and so he broke off his foolish attack against her husband.

But that doesn't mean that Nabal was off the hook. When Abigail returned home, he was so drunk from partying all night that she waited until the next morning to tell him how close David had come to killing him and every other man on the farm. This news gave Nabal such a panic that he had a stroke and fell into a coma until he died ten days later. Yes, Abigail had been right, God would deal with Nabal in His time and in His way. There had been no need for David to involve himself in the matter.

Who are the Abigails God has sent into your life? Have you humbly listened to these God-sent messengers, as did David? Or do you dig your heels in and keep listening to your sinful nature which asserts that you have every right to be angry and to act in revenge?

Such pride is dangerous because it's not only the sin of making ourselves lord and god, it's dangerous because whatever we do in anger can harm a lot of other innocent people. How many families and how many congregations have been torn apart because of such stubborn anger and pride?

Oh Lord forgive us for not welcoming the Abigails you have sent our way. Forgive us for not being an Abigail ourselves to the people who are close to us. Forgive us for standing idly by as their anger has burned. Give us the tact and courage that Abigail displayed so that we may be the peacemakers You have called us to be.

While we may succeed in turning another person's anger away with our words, we can't do the same with God's anger can we? When God's anger burns against our sins, nothing we say, nothing we do can turn that anger away. But we're not destined to be destroyed by that anger, because God's Son, Jesus, stepped into the breach for us just as Abigail stepped into David's path turning him away from venting his anger. Only Jesus offered His life in exchange for ours; not just placating words as had Abigail.

While David did not kill Nabal, I don't think he would be eager to be his buddy thereafter. But God is eager for you to see Him as your parent and protector. That's why He has gathered you close to His heart and promises to fling away those who want to destroy you. So no, there's no need for us to respond to such people in anger. Let God deal with them, even as He dealt with Nabal.

Finally, what about Abigail? She had closed her conversation with David by asking him to someday remember her; that day came sooner than she thought. Hearing of Nabal's death, David immediately sent for and proposed marriage to Abigail. The attraction must have been mutual, because she accepted. Thus, the ironic conclusion of this entire event is that because

of his foolish refusal, David not only acquired Nabal's wise and beautiful wife, but along with her also came his farm and all of his wealth.

This second Sunday in Easter, let's thank God who in His mercy sent Jesus into our lives and Who, along with Him, gives us a rich inheritance as children of the Living God.