

R&R; in the Wilderness

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 January 2023

Preacher: Jack Gamble-Smith

[0 : 00] And maybe as you listen to these verses being read, you wonder why in the world would you choose this passage for your time to preach?

What could he possibly do with this passage? Does he not realize John 3.16 exists? And there are easier passages you could choose than this whole chapter. And maybe you come across sections like this in your Bible all the time and you kind of, if you're like me, you read it, you kind of scratch your head and you move on and hope the next chapter will bear more fruit for your day.

And many of the commentators and pastors I listened to on this passage seemed pretty confused as well. One of the most interesting that I saw was a sermon on this passage titled, What to Do When You're in a Bad Marriage?

I'm not sure what advice it necessarily had, but that would be a very interesting sermon to listen to, although I did not listen to it. But I mean, the question is real. What do we actually do with passages like this that are in our Bible?

Because I don't think the primary point of this text is for all of the men to think, okay, do not be like Nabal and all of the women to think, be like Abigail. I think there's more to it than that.

[1 : 12] A biography I was reading recently began with these words. It said, in reality, it's impossible to write a person's biography. For what we call a person's life constitutes only half of that person's existence.

What he has done, thought, sought, what sins he has committed. A truly biographical sketch would require seeing the other half of a person's life as well.

God's dealings with him, God's boundless concern for him, God's gracious watchfulness over him. And when I read that quote, it kind of helped me to realize the beauty of what we actually have in the Bible.

We don't just have a record of what people did and thought and sinned or didn't sin or didn't do, but we're also given an inspired look behind the curtain, an account of God's dealings with man and of his concerns for human and his silent hand holding us humans as they walk day to day.

And what I realized is most of the sermons and commentaries that I read on this passage only got the first half of the story. They only got Nabal shouldn't have been doing what he was doing.

[2 : 25] So you also don't do that. Or Abigail was doing what she should have been doing, so do that. But most people missed the second, the kind of the unseen half of this passage, God's hand working and God dealing with these people.

And that's really, as I'm convinced, what this passage is all about. It's about God's hand intervening in normal everyday affairs. It's about his silent providence, stopping some people's hearts and pulling other people's hearts back and the arm of the Lord being revealed in daily life.

So the way I wanna kinda go about this is just to introduce you to each of these three characters. I wanna introduce you to Nabal. I wanna introduce you to David. I wanna introduce you to Abigail in that order and look at both what they do and what God does with these people.

What his hand does with these people. So let's begin with Nabal. If you look back at the text, we're introduced to Nabal immediately in verse two. It says, there was a man in my own whose business was in Carmel.

And the first thing that we should notice is the first thing we learn about this man, if you look, is his business. And if you look at the next sentence, we're told that this man not only has a business, but the next thing you're told is he's very, very rich.

[3 : 42] And if you're wondering how rich he is, just look at the next sentence and it says how rich he was, thousands of sheep and goats. But the interesting thing is we still haven't been told his name yet.

Which is interesting because at this time, people weren't really defined by their occupations just yet. They were defined by their family or their clan or who their father was. So to introduce someone by their business, it has to be intentional and we need to notice why would the author do that?

Why have his possessions and his property and his business precede even his name or his family? And the reason is I think the narrator wants us to see in the black and white words of the story that this man's possessions are much more important to him than even his name or his family, whatever that is.

This man's life revolves around his property, around his wealth. That is what we should know about Nabal. And only after being told about all of his sheep and all of his property and his business are we finally told his name in verse three.

And it says now, almost as if the narrator realizes that he hasn't told you his name yet. He says now, the name of the man was Nabal. And in Hebrew, this is not the name you'd want to name your son.

[4 : 59] This literally means fool. And this doesn't mean fool as in he's just a little bit slow. He wasn't the top of his class. One commentator put it as the word Nabal describes a vicious, materialistic and egocentric misfit.

It describes someone who has a sphere of influences, influence and squanders that sphere of influence. It describes someone who uses his influence for nothing and is really nothing himself.

This is the same word that's used all throughout the Proverbs to describe the fool. And if you think of Proverbs 14, says the fool says in his heart, there is no God.

Literally, the Nabal says in his heart, there is no God. And if you've ever wondered when you're reading the book of Proverbs, it talks so much about the fool, you wonder what would this fool actually look like if I came into contact with him?

Or maybe someone comes to mind, but you're about to meet him here. This is what the fool of Proverbs looks like. And the rest of the chapter is just showing you how foolish this Nabal really is, how much he lives up to his name.

[6 : 04] And the next time we meet Nabal in this passage, if you look at verse nine, we meet him again in verse nine, and David's men are knocking at his door on a feast day. So he's feasting.

And something in it should all pause in this moment and just say, what is this fool going to do? And if you look at the end of verse nine, it says David's men waited too.

It says they waited. And it's important in a text like this to think about why are the details included? Why does it tell you that they waited at his door? And I think it's because the text wants you to know how inconsiderate this man actually is.

These are men who've been protecting his flocks, they've been protecting his shepherds, and they come and they say, on a feast day, after he sheared his sheep, got his money, and they ask for payment for the services they've been rightly giving him.

And Nabal is in no rush, even to get up from the table to respond to the door. So the men wait. And when he finally does come to the door, it's no less insulting.

[7 : 09] Look at what he says in verse 10. The first words out of Nabal's mouth that we hear from him are, who's David? And if you think about this, who is David is not a question anybody would be asking in Israel at this time.

Israel knew exactly who David was. The land had sung his praises. David was a war hero. Who's David? You can almost hear the spite, you can almost hear the condescension, not condensation, in his voice.

See, this isn't an honest question. This is a challenge, this is a bite. See, people knew that David was the Lord's anointed, and Nabal was essentially saying, who's the Lord's anointed to me?

I am king of this region. See, Carmel, there wouldn't have been room for two guys as powerful as Nabal there. Who's David here on my land in my Carmel?

And then he continues, if you look again, he says, who's David? Who's the son of Jesse? There are many servants these days who are breaking away from their masters.

[8 : 21] And Nabal makes it very clear, he's not actually asking who Nabal is, because he shows, I know exactly who David's father is. I know who he is.

That's that boy, that's that boy who broke away from his master. Nabal's message is clear. David's just a boy, a boy who isn't welcomed here, and a boy who should go home to his master.

And if you look at verse 11, like all fools, Nabal just keeps talking. If you look, read in verse 11, it says, shall I take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shears and give it to men who come from I do not know where?

What do you notice about that? It's filled with first person pronouns. My, my, my, I. His sentences are packed with himself.

In Hebrew, there are eight uses of the first person pronoun here. And now we can see that the way the narrator introduced us to Nabal, how fitting that is, even if just listening to him for like two sentences, his possessions are even more a part of who he is, even then his name, which is saying something.

[9 : 28] And if we're tracking through the story and watching Nabal, we meet him just one more time. If you look at verse 36, Abigail, returning from her meeting with David, comes back and Nabal is again feasting.

He's gorging himself. If you look at verses 36 and 37, it says, and Abigail came to Nabal and behold, he was holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king.

And then 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 as a stone.

Do you notice the contrast there in just two verses? It talks about his heart twice. It says first, his heart was merry within him. And then just a couple's words later, it says his heart died within him.

And we have to ask the question, what caused it? What went from a heart being merry to a heart being dead in just one verse? And if you look right in the middle of those two things, the thing that changed his heart was his wife told him these things.

[10 : 42] What are these things? What did his wife actually tell him? Well, his wife told him that while he was drunk and while he was feasting, 400 men and David came up to kill him.

They were coming to take everything he held so dearly from him, his food, his sheep, his money, his reputation, all of it would be gone in one short ride.

And my guess is that he felt his own vulnerability, something that a fool never likes to feel. And he thinks my sheep wouldn't have protected me. My power wouldn't have saved me from those men.

See, he's feasting like a king, but in reality, he was just a sheep fattening himself for the slaughter. And it becomes obvious if you look again, why the narrator says that he was feasting like a king because Nabal isn't a king.

Nabal's a fool. He had no castle, his servants hated him and were quick to turn their back on him. His wife was unhappy with him. Nobody liked Nabal, but Nabal.

[11 : 47] And just like that, we see God's hand intervene into the story. And we can almost feel the shocking juxtaposition of these two things, this king-like figure who's sitting on top of his mountain, feasting atop his wealth, surrounded by his property, with no regard for anyone but himself and his sheep.

And the Lord just reaches out and says, that's enough. And in a moment, Nabal and we are reminded, who's really on the throne here?

Who's the true king, not like a king? In a moment, the true reality of Nabal's heart, the mask is just ripped away in a second. And it literally says, if you look at the text, it says, the wine ran out of Nabal.

And when it ran out of him, nothing was left, but a heart of stone. You see, my guess is he filled his days with wine and food and his property because he wanted to silence that gnawing reality that his heart was stone.

And then you have verse 38, and it says, in about 10 days later, 10 days after his heart became stone, the Lord struck Nabal and he died.

[13 : 04] And you have this strange 10 day period here where Nabal, we can picture him just lying there like a stone. And I think this 10 day period was a kindness of God to give him 10 days to think about his own nakedness, his own vulnerability.

Almost as if God were whispering to him for 10 days straight, do you see me now? You are not the king, you are not God. You are not God.

But even in his shame, even in his own paralysis, Nabal's fists tighten and his heart refuses to bow still to anyone but himself.

He would rather die than bow to God. He still insists, there is no God except myself, even after being struck by him. And then the Lord says, that's enough.

And he strikes him dead. That's Nabal. So now that we've met Nabal, let's back up and I want you to meet David. Let's look at David now.

[14 : 12] This is, when you think about it, actually a very fascinating chapter when you think about the life of David because it almost seems like we meet a different David when we come to 1st Samuel chapter 25. We all know the David who was the humble shepherd boy who had his harp and would sing Psalms to the Lord.

We know that David. We knew the David who would go out and fight against the Philistine rather than have anyone insult the name of the Lord. We know that David. We knew the David who wouldn't pursue the Philistines without checking with the Lord twice to make sure that the Lord, he had the Lord's blessing.

We knew that David whose heart condemned him for so much as tearing a piece of Saul's robe and saying, who am I to touch the Lord's anointed? I can't touch the Lord's anointed. We know that David.

But now as we just turn the page of our Bible, we meet what seems like a different David, a David who snaps in a second at an insult from some random person, a David who is willing to kill over his own honor for his own sake, for his own benefit.

And the reality is we meet here a David who looks sadly a lot like a Saul in this chapter. If you think back to the story of 1st Samuel chapter 21 and 22, David and his men are on the run again and they're hungry and they come to the house of a priest, a Himelek, if you remember that story, and they ask him for food.

[15 : 40] And the Himelek gives them what little food he has and even gives David the sword of Goliath to protect himself. And David and his men leave and Saul follows David and his men.

And Saul and his men come to the house of a Himelek and they know that this priest helped David. And one of Saul's men at his command slaughters a Himelek and 85 priests.

Most of Saul's men weren't even willing to do it. They said, this is too far. But one of them said, I'll slaughter them. And here in chapter 25, we have what's kind of an eerily similar story in some ways actually.

David and his men again are on the run. They again approach a house, they're hungry, looking for food. But the different thing this time is that Nabal says no. And David and his men, just like Saul and his men, did they pull out their swords and they come to kill over it.

And in this chapter, David almost becomes a Saul. He almost does the same thing that Saul and his men did. And the question we have to ask, when we see these two things, we see these parallel counts is, why didn't David do it?

[16 : 51] What's the difference between Saul and David? Is it that David thought of something before he did it? And he's like, no, I shouldn't do this. Is it that David was doing it and said, I'm not this type of guy.

I'm actually a good guy. I'm not a bad guy. And the answer is no. David and his men were riding up to do it. And David knows the only thing that stands that was different.

And he tells you in verse 34, if you look at verse 34, he says, the thing that made it different was the Lord, the God of Israel restrained me.

That's the only difference. And the word restrained is used often in the Bible to speak of pulling things back or holding back waters or pulling things back from something.

And in verse 33, David says, he uses that word and he says he was kept back. He was, God pulled him back from doing what he was about to do. And again, you look at verse 39, this is so central to David's mind.

[17 : 51] He says, David says, blessed be the Lord who has kept back his servant from wrongdoing. So what was the difference between Saul and David? It wasn't that, it was that the Lord's hand pulled David back from his own sinfulness.

Just as the Lord pulled back the waters before the Israelites, so they could walk through, the Lord pulled back David from committing this act from his own sinfulness.

You see this passage, when we think about for Samuel 25, it's not six principles, not to lose your temper or a marriage guide to always listen to your wife or a diet pamphlet for moderate eating and not gorging yourself with food.

It's none of those things. It's a picture of contrasts, of what happens to Saul when God pulls back his hand from him and what happens to David when God doesn't and he restrains him.

Do you see, David wasn't just a better guy than Saul. God decided, even covenanted, to have his hand actively involved in the life of David.

[18 : 57] Look what Abigail even says, you look at verse 29, about how the Lord cares for David so intimately. He says, the life of my Lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living care of the Lord your God.

How intimate of an expression is that? Bound up in the bundle of the living care of the Lord. In other words, God has wrapped his arms around David and covenanted not to ever let him go.

God said, I'm not pulling my arm back. I am your God and you are mine. And I wonder if we think about grace like that. Do we think about grace as just the forgiveness of our past sins and not as the hand of God holding you back from your own sinful inclinations.

Of God covenanting and saying, I am your God, I will hold you back even from your own self. Do you think about the reality that God intercepts us on the road to our own folly, that he graciously builds walls that block our fallen efforts.

And I wonder how we would pray differently as believers if we actually believed those things. Would we pray, God, would you frustrate my sinful purposes?

[20 : 16] God, would you get in my way today of things that are against your name? God, would you pull me back from my own sinful inclinations? God, would you hold my own heart back from things that it wants so desperately that are wrong?

And I wonder if you thank God when he says no to you. Look at how David prays in verse 39. He said, blessed be the Lord, who has kept back his servant from wrong doing, blessed be the Lord.

How often do we say that? Blessed be the Lord, because he's kept me back from that. The theologian, I don't know if any of you have heard of him, Herman Bovink, wrote, how little God is recognized for what he gives us.

And I would add how little God is recognized for what he also keeps from us. You see, in David's folly, even in your folly, in my folly, God does not relinquish his hold on a sunken humankind.

He still has his hands wrapped around your heart, and he holds you and says, I'm not letting you go. And the most terrifying reality that could ever happen for any of our lives would be for God to loosen his grip, for God to let you go, for God to, as Paul would later say in Romans, to turn you over to yourself.

[21 : 38] Praise God that he wraps his hands around us, even in our own folly, and may we beg him to hold our hearts back from our own sinful inclinations. Because God's hand is the only thing that kept David from becoming a fool.

And when we begin to view our world through that lens and see God's arm is holding us and pulling us back from things, it actually changes the way we view, even our own past.

We can say thank you for very hard things, all of a sudden. We can say, Lord, I trust that that was your strong, kind arm when I didn't get that job that I so wanted.

We can say, Lord, I trust that that was your arm when I lost this loved one or this little baby in a miscarriage or when life doesn't turn out the way we had planned.

And we can say, God, I don't understand, and I don't even really feel your arm all the time, but I trust that you're kind, and I trust that your arm is here holding me. You see, in some ways, First Samuel is a tailor, a tailor, a tailor, a tailor, a tailor, First Samuel is a tale of fools.

[22 : 50] We have Saul, we have Nabal, we even have David, who are all acting like fools at this moment. And the only thing that differentiated their own foolishness was their reaction to the hand of God.

That was the only thing that differentiated. When David encountered the arm of God, he said, bless to be the Lord, the God of Israel, for your arm intervening. And when the other two interacted with the arm of God, they clinched their fists and they closed their eyes and they say, but what about my reputation?

What about my property? What about these other things? What do we do with the arm of God? And now as we come to a conclusion, let's meet our final character.

We've seen Nabal, we've seen David, let's meet Abigail. And we meet Abigail again. If we look at the very beginning, back in verse three, we meet her immediately and just notice how differently she's introduced to us the Nabal.

We're told her name immediately in the text. The name of his wife was Abigail. And if you look at verse three, it actually forms a chiasm. If you look at verse three, it says, that now the name of the man was Nabal and the name of his wife Abigail.

[24 : 06] The woman was discerning and beautiful, but the man was harsh and badly behaved. He was a Calebite. See the descriptions of Abigail and Nabal are wrapped around each other and you can feel how different these polar opposite, these two descriptions are of each other.

These two don't even belong in the same sentence with each other, let alone the same marriage with each other. Nabal is a gorging fool and Abigail is beautiful and wise and discerning.

Nabal was introduced by his sheep. Abigail is introduced by her name and her wisdom and her character. And the word used to describe Abigail might be discerning in your Bible.

That might be the word that it says there. But it's the word used all throughout the Proverbs for wisdom. Here are just a few examples if you, these are from Proverbs. The first one's from Proverbs chapter 12.

A man shall be commended according to his wisdom. That's the word for discerning that's used here. But he that is perverse heart shall be despised. Another one, Proverbs 16.

[25 : 12] Understanding, that's the same word used to describe Abigail is a wellspring of life unto him that have it. But the correction of fools is their folly.

And do you see how this word is always contrasted with foolishness, with folly? It's the exact opposite of it. And that's exactly what's true of Abigail. She is the exact opposite of her husband in every way.

She is wisdom embodied. And notice how Abigail's put forward in this narrative. She's given in verses 24 through 31, she's given the longest speech of any woman in the Old Testament.

Look what she says to David. She says in verse 28, she says, for the Lord will certainly make my Lord a sure house. Notice what else she says.

She says, the lives of your enemy, he shall sling out from the hollow of a sling. You can hear the imagery of David with his sling. It's a good metaphor.

[26 : 13] He will appoint you prince over Israel, is what Abigail tells David. And if you think about what she's actually telling him there, it's actually pretty astonishing, because those are the first traces of the Davidic covenant that she's speaking to him.

12 chapters before God ever makes the Davidic covenant with David. In her wisdom, Abigail is functioning prophetically. You see, our chapter started with Samuel dying, and then we have Abigail rise up, and she speaks prophecy over David.

And the next way we see her functioning in this is we see her standing in between David and Nabal. And she interestingly bears the guilt for her husband.

Notice the first words out of her mouth when she meets David. She falls to the ground and she says, on me alone be the guilt of my husband. In other words, I'll bear the sin of that fool.

I'll take his place. You punish me for my foolish husband. And she in essence says to David and his men, please put away your swords.

[27 : 23] And if you look at verse 26, look what she saved David from. She saved David from blood guilt. And she says in verse 28, she says, please forgive the trespass of your servant.

And I think most of us when we read that, we think she's asking for the forgiveness of Nabal. But even though you can't see in the English, the Hebrew word for servant should be something like maid servant.

It's a feminine word. In other words, I've absorbed the sin of my own husband. Forgive me because I'll take his sin for him. In other words, how is Abigail functioning?

She's acting as both a priest and she's acting as a sacrifice. And the third way Abigail's functioning is she takes the action. Do you notice how much initiative she takes in this story?

If you just look at verse 14, one of the servants runs to Abigail and tells her what Nabal has done because she knows, I can't run to Nabal. And Abigail acts.

[28 : 24] She just immediately acts. Starting in verse 14, almost every sentence that isn't a dialogue, Abigail is the subject of that sentence, almost every single one.

Just run your eyes down the page. If you look at verse 18, then Abigail. Verse 19, and she said, verse 20, and as she wrote, verse 23, she hurried, verse 24, she fell.

Do you see the picture? Abigail stepped into the situation. She took it into her own hands. Verse 14, literally in Hebrew starts, you have David and his men riding up, and it says in Hebrew, but Abigail.

In other words, Nabal's made a fool of himself. David and his men are coming up with swords, everywhere, but Abigail. The situation would have gotten out of hand, but Abigail.

See, she's functioning as a sort of ruler in this situation. She's controlling the situation. So do you see how the text is putting Abigail before us here?

[29 : 33] She is the full embodiment of wisdom itself. She is the prophet in place of the dead Samuel. The priest in the sacrifice in the place of the wayward priesthood, and she rules decisively in place of the fallen king of Ithsal.

And I hope all of a sudden the dots begin to fall into place for you of what's happening here. And with shadows of John 12 happening, we see Abigail ride down the mountain on a donkey toward David.

Toward David. And when David sees her, he cries out in verse 32, blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel who sent you this day to meet me.

And in this we hear echoes, shadows of Luke one. And in Luke one, right after the hand of the Lord restrained the tongue of Zachariah. And it says in verse 66 in Luke chapter one, the hand of the Lord was with him, Zachariah.

Then Zachariah calls out, blessed be the Lord, God of Israel, almost the same as what David says when he sees Abigail. For he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David.

[30 : 52] As he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. And where's this all in?

Where does this story conclude in conclusion? Abigail, if we're following her, she returns a second time. This time not to satisfy blood guilt, not to die for the fool, but for a marriage.

And once again Abigail rises and she mounts the donkey and in verse 41, what does she say? She says, I will come and I'll wash the feet of the servants of my Lord. I'll come and I'll wash their feet.

You see, in chapter 24 and 26 of 1 Samuel, you have these parallel accounts where David has an opportunity to kill Saul and he decides not to kill Saul.

And the reason he doesn't kill Saul in each of them is theology. He saw Saul and he said, this is the Lord's anointed. Who am I to touch the anointed of the Lord?

[31 : 53] This is the chosen one of God. I can't touch him. And yet in 1 Samuel 25, David also has the opportunity to kill. And what holds him back here isn't theology, isn't thinking of the Lord's anointed, but a shadow of the Lord's anointed.

A figure writing out to him on a donkey saying, I'll die for the fool. Take me instead of the fool. In Zephaniah chapter 3, there's a beautiful section about the day when the Lord will be in the midst of his people.

And it talks about how he's going to deal with all of their enemies and all of their oppressors. And there's this beautiful little verse that says, in that day he will quiet you by his love.

And isn't that the picture of what we're given in 1 Samuel 25 through Abigail? Abigail, whose name in Hebrew literally means the delight of the Father.

Words which were spoken of Jesus in his baptism. She is a shadow of Christ who quiets David with love. And just ending, this is what the arm of the Lord should do for you.

[33 : 06] It should quiet your heart and love. The strong, silent province of God should comfort your troubled heart that you bring here. It should enable you to look at your past and say, blessed be the God of Israel.

Even when you said no in really hard ways. And it's here in a passage that at first seems so strange and obscure that we see the hands of the Lord really revealed.

We see it revealed in the silencing of the fool who refused to acknowledge God. We see it, the arm of the Lord revealed in the restraining of David. We see the arm of the Lord revealed in the shadowy figure who rides down and quiets David in love, who bears the guilt of the fool, who speaks prophetically to David when the prophet is dead, who washes the feet of the servants.

And it all ends in a great marriage celebration. And then she essentially disappears out of our Bibles. This is redemption and restraint in the wilderness.

And in verse 34, David realizes how lost he would have been, quote, unless you had hurried out to meet me. Unless Abigail had hurried out to meet him and quieted him in love.

[34 : 24] And I just in closing, is that the cry of your heart tonight? Is that the cry of my heart that Jesus, unless you had come and hurried out to meet me, oh, what would become of me? Oh, how lost I would have been without that.

Let me close this in prayer. Father, how lost we would have been if Christ wouldn't have hurried down to meet us and wouldn't have taken the place of the fool written in on a donkey and bore the wrath that was ours.

Lord, thank you for your word. Thank you how beautiful it is. Pray that we would see your arm more evidently and that we would lean on it and trust it, even when it says hard, even when it does hard things and takes, shares things away from us and that we would trust in your arm and love it.

Thank you for your kindness to us. Pray that we would be comforted by your love. Our troubled hearts would be quieted by your love. And I pray this in Christ's name. Amen.