

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST



Today our message in our series, “People in the Bible You Should Know” (but may not), is once again about a woman buried deep in the pages of the Old Testament. Her name is Abigail. Now last week was about a man with a very unique name, Mephibosheth. Today is a name that is still very popular. How many have “Abby’s” in your immediate family?

Her story is found in one chapter in the Bible, 1 Samuel 25. Let’s turn there if you have closed your Bible’s after the reading.

Before some background, let me tell you about another true story...

Ernest Gordon was a robust Scottish soldier in his early twenties in World War II. He was one of many, captured by the Japanese and placed in a jungle prison camp named Chungkai. After months of back-breaking, daily beatings, and slow starvation, Scotland seemed a universe away. Civility, even farther.

Coming to the camp as a new prisoner, he found his fellow prisoners behaving like barbarians -- stealing from each other, robbing dying colleagues, fighting for food scraps. The law of the jungle has become the law of the camp.

But now Ernest is dying. He is in some ways happy about it. Death by disease trumps life in Chungkai.

But then something wonderful happens. Two new prisoners, in whom hope still stirs; are transferred to the camp. Though also sick and frail, they heed a higher code. They share their meager meals and volunteer for extra work. They cleanse Gordon's ulcerated sores and massage his atrophied legs. They give him his first bath in six weeks. His strength slowly returns and, with it, his dignity.

Their goodness proves contagious, and Gordon catches it. He begins to treat the sick and share his rations. He even gives away his few belongings. Other soldiers do likewise. Over time, the tone of the camp softens and brightens. Sacrifice replaces selfishness. Soldiers hold worship services and Bible studies.

Twenty years later, when Gordon served as chaplain of Princeton University, he described the transformation with these words:

“Death was still with us—no doubt about that. But we were slowly being freed from its destructive grip. Selfishness, hatred ... and pride were all anti-life. Love

...self-sacrifice ... and faith, on the other hand, were the essence of life ... gifts of God to men. ... Death no longer had the last word at Chungkai.”

Selfishness, hatred, and pride—you don't have to go to a POW camp to find them, do you? A dormitory will do just fine. As will the office or the school lunchroom. The “code of the jungle” is alive and well. *Every man for himself. Get all you can. Survival of the fittest.*

Does that code contaminate your world? Do personal possessive pronouns dominate the language of your circle? “*My career, my dreams, my stuff.*” I want things to go *my way on my schedule.*” If so, you know how savage this giant can be. Yet, every so often, a diamond glitters in the mud. A coworker shares, a fellow student cares, or Abigail, stunning Abigail, stands on your trail.

I. BACKGROUND

As we look at the background of our story, we go all the way back to the beginning days of Israel – when King Saul, the first king, was still ruling Israel, and David was on the run from Saul’s men.

1 Samuel 25:1-2 *Now Samuel died, and all Israel assembled and mourned for him; and they buried him at his home in Ramah. Then David moved down into the Desert of Maon. 2A certain man in Maon, who had property there at Carmel, was very wealthy. He had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep, which he was shearing in Carmel.*

This man name is Nabal whose name means “fool” in Hebrew. He lived up to the definition. Abigail was married to Nabal.

v.3 *His name was Nabal and his wife’s name was Abigail. She was an intelligent and beautiful woman, but her husband, a Calebite, was surly and mean in his dealings.*

Let’s start with Nabal. Think of him as the Saddam Hussein of the territory. He owned cattle and sheep and took pride in both. He kept his liquor cabinet full, his date life hot, and motored around in a stretch limo. Half a dozen

linebacker-size security guards followed him wherever he went. Nabal needed the protection. According to **v. 17**, ... *He is such a wicked man that no one can talk to him.*"

He was a **beast**. He learned people skills in the local zoo. He never met a person he couldn't anger or a relationship he couldn't spoil. Nabal's world revolved around one person—Nabal. He owed nothing to anybody and laughed at the thought of sharing with anyone.

Especially **David**.

Now David was on the run, but he was not a criminal. God already had the Prophet Samuel anoint him to be the next King, but Saul is trying to prevent it. So David and his 600 hundred soldiers, while hiding out in this land, play Robin Hood, protecting the farmers and shepherds from thieves and marauders. Israel had no highway patrol or police force, so David and his mighty men met a definite need in the countryside. They guarded with enough effectiveness to prompt one of Nabal's shepherds to say in **v. 26** *"Night and day they were a wall around us all the time we were herding our sheep near them"*.

1 Samuel 25:4 *⁴While David was in the desert, he heard that Nabal was shearing sheep.*

Trouble began to brew after the harvest. With sheep sheared and harvest gathered, it was time to lay back, take it easy and enjoy the fruits of the labor. As we pick up the story, Nabal's men are doing just that.

David hears of the party and thinks his men deserve an invitation. After all, they've protected the man's crops and sheep, patrolled the hills and secured the valleys. They deserve a bit of the bounty. David sends ten men to Nabal with this request: **v.8** *"Therefore be favorable toward my young men, since we come at a festive time. Please give your servants and your son David whatever you can find for them."*

Nabal, with all the tact and brains of a cockroach, replies:

1 Samuel 25:10-11 ...*"Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days. ¹¹Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows*

where?"

Nabal pretends he's never heard of David, lumping him in with common criminals. After protecting his flocks, such insolence infuriates the messengers, and they turn and hurry back to David with a full report.

David doesn't need to hear the news twice. He tells the men to form a posse...

1 Samuel 25:13 *¹³David said to his men, "Put on your swords!" So they put on their swords, and David put on his. About four hundred men went up with David, while two hundred stayed with the supplies.*

Four hundred men mount up and take off. Eyes glare. Nostrils flare. Lips snarl. Testosterone flows. David and his troops thunder down on Nabal the scoundrel, who obliviously drinks beer and eats barbecue with his buddies. The road rumbles as David grumbles, **v.22** *"May God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to him!"*

Hang on people. It's the Wild, Wild West in the Ancient East.

II. ABIGAIL

That's the background.

1 Samuel 25:14 *¹⁴One of the servants told Nabal's wife Abigail: "David sent messengers from the desert to give our master his greetings, but he hurled insults at them.*

All of a sudden, BEAUTY appears. A daisy lifts her head in the desert; a whiff of perfume floats through the men's locker room. Abigail, the wife of Nabal, stands on the trail. Whereas he is brutish and mean, she is, **v. 3** *"intelligent and good-looking"* (MSG).

Brains *and* beauty. Some things never change. Brains and Beauty – now that's a winning combination in any culture.

Abigail puts both to work. When she learns of Nabal's crude response, she springs into action and races to intercept David.

1 Samuel 25:18 *¹⁸Abigail lost no time. She took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, five seahs of roasted grain, a hundred cakes of raisins and two hundred cakes of pressed figs, and loaded them*

on donkeys.

Four hundred men see Abigail and this feast standing in the trail, and rein in their rides. “Whoa!” Some gape at the food; others gawk at the female. After all, she’s “good lookin’ with good cookin’”, a combination that stops any army.

Abigail’s no fool. She knows the importance of the moment. She stands as the final barrier between her family and sure death. Falling at David’s feet, she issues a plea: **vv. 24-25** *“My lord, let the blame be on me alone. Please let your servant speak to you; hear what your servant has to say. ²⁵May my lord pay no attention to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name—his name is Fool, and folly goes with him...”*

She doesn’t defend Nabal but agrees that he is a scoundrel. She begs not for justice but forgiveness, accepting blame when she deserves none. She offer the gifts from her house and next she does something that shows great wisdom. She urges David to leave Nabal to God and avoid the dead weight of remorse. She pleads that he refrain from returning evil with evil. Wrong with wrong. “Two wrongs don’t make a right” – that saying could come from her wisdom.

Vv. 26-29 *²⁶“Now since the Lord has kept you, my master, from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hands, as surely as the Lord lives and as you live, may your enemies and all who intend to harm my master be like Nabal. ²⁷And let this gift, which your servant has brought to my master, be given to the men who follow you. ²⁸Please forgive your servant’s offense, for the Lord will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my master, because he fights the Lord’s battles. Let no wrongdoing be found in you as long as you live. ²⁹Even though someone is pursuing you to take your life, the life of my master will be bound securely in the bundle of the living by the Lord your God. But the lives of your enemies he will hurl away as from the pocket of a sling.*

Her words fall on David like August sun on ice. He melts.

Vv. 32-33 *³²David said to Abigail, “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. ³³May you be blessed for*

your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands.

V. 35 *³⁵Then David accepted from her hand what she had brought him and said, “Go home in peace. I have heard your words and granted your request.”*

She was the right messenger with the right message.

[Note: I think of the T-Mobile *Mobile-Makover* commercial... think about it.]

The massacre is averted. David returns to camp. Abigail returns to Nabal. She finds him drunk and oblivious to what just almost happened. She gets no thanks but she’s probably used to that. Too drunk for conversation Abigail waits until the next morning to describe how, close Nabal came to death.

Vv.37-38 *³⁷Then in the morning, when Nabal was sober, his wife told him all these things, and his heart failed him and he became like a stone. ³⁸About ten days later, the Lord struck Nabal and he died.*

Now in **vv. 39-41**, when David learns of Nabal’s death and Abigail’s sudden availability he thanks God for the first and takes advantage of the second. Unable to shake the memory of the pretty woman with the wisdom of a sage, David proposes, and she accepts. David gets a new wife, Abigail a new home and we have a happy ending!

III. WHAT DO WE LEARN? (FROM OUR 3 CHARACTERS)

DAVID: Trust God to Make Things Right

Romans 12:19 *¹⁹Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.*

2 Samuel 16:11-12 *¹¹David then said to Abishai and all his officials, “My son, who is of my own flesh, is trying to take my life. How much more, then, this Benjamite! Leave him alone; let him curse, for the Lord has told him to. ¹²It may be that the Lord will see my distress and repay me with good for the cursing I am receiving today.”*

Just as Abigail did with Nabal – trusted God to either “change him or kill him”. Not a bad prayer – just don’t assist God...

NABAL: Be a fool with God and it will catch up with you

- Nabal should have bowed at David’s feet as the Lord’s anointed. Instead he chose to go his own way. People today do the same thing...
- People today may give “lip service” but no real service to God. (if you believe you should be a worshipper...faithful, servant)

ABIGAIL: Beauty Can Overcome Barbarism.

Meekness saved the day that day. Abigail’s gentleness reversed a river of anger. Humility has such power. Apologies can disarm arguments. Contrition can defuse rage. Olive branches do more good than battle-axes ever will. *"Soft speech can break bones"* (Prov. 25:15 NLT).

Abigail teaches so much. The contagious power of kindness. The strength of a gentle heart.

Her greatest lesson, however, is to take our eyes from her beauty and set them on someone else’s. She lifts our thoughts from a rural trail to a Jerusalem cross. Abigail never knew Jesus. She lived a thousand years before his sacrifice. Nevertheless, *her story prefigures his life.*

- Abigail placed herself between David and Nabal. Jesus placed himself between God and us.
- Abigail volunteered to be punished for Nabal’s sins. Jesus allowed heaven to punish him for yours and mine.
- Abigail turned away the anger of David. Didn’t Christ shield you from God’s?

He was our *"Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone"* (1Tim. 2:5-6 NLT). A mediator is one who stands in between? And what did Christ do but stand in between God’s anger and our punishment? Christ intercepted the wrath of heaven.

Something remotely similar happened at the Chungkai prison camp. One evening after work detail, a Japanese guard announced that a shovel was missing. The officer kept the prisoners in formation,

insisting that someone had stolen it. Screaming in broken English, he demanded that the guilty man step forward. He shouldered his rifle, threatening to kill one prisoner at a time until a confession was made.

The Scottish soldier, Ernest Gordon, broke ranks, stood stiffly at attention, and said, "I did it." The officer unleashed his anger and beat the man to death. Then they picked up Gordon’s body and their tools and returned to camp. Only then were the shovels recounted. The Japanese soldier had made a mistake. No shovel was missing after all.

Who does that? What kind of person would take the blame for something he didn’t do?

When you find the right adjective, attach it to Jesus. *"God has piled all our sins, everything we’ve done wrong, on him, on him"* (Isa. 53:6 MSG). God treated his innocent Son like the guilty human race, his Holy One like a lying scoundrel, his Abigail like a Nabal.

Christ lived the life we could not live and took the punishment we could not take, to offer the hope we dare not resist.

If you have never received what Jesus Christ came to offer, why would you wait another moment? Who could deserve what Christ did for us? No one. Unlike Chungkai, we DO deserve the punishment, but HE stepped out of line and took it anyways! And he offers the forgiveness we can get nowhere else with a simple act of faith. Trust in what he did for us. Won’t you put your faith in Jesus today?

THEN His sacrifice begs us to ask this question: *if he so loved us, can we not love each other?* Having been forgiven, can we not forgive? Having feasted at the table of grandeur, can we not share a few crumbs? *"My dear, dear friends, if God loved like this, we certainly ought to love each other"* (1 John 4:11 MSG).

CONCLUSION

Do you find your Nabal world hard to stomach? Then do what David did: stop staring at Nabal. Shift your gaze to your mediator. To Christ. When you do that, you too can become a blossom in the dessert. A beauty among the beasts. You can help transform your prison camp into a place where *selfishness, hatred, and pride and death no longer have the last word.*

[Note: This message based on a study of Abigail by Max Lucado.]