

Title: A Surprising Mercy
Text: 1 Samuel 25:18-35
Theme: God's provision of rescue
Series: 1 Samuel
Prop Stmtnt: God provides us with a rescue, but we have to be humble enough to take it.

Last week, we left off with David and his men starting on a mission of revenge. A local businessman had offended David and David was going to do something about it. There is a lot at stake. Revenge is powerful and destructive. The DIA is the home of the painting of Peter Rubens that attempts to capture the moment when David meets Abigail. The painting, while worth a fortune, has a number of historical inaccuracies in it, but Rubens rightfully picks a scene that is so intense that the reader is holding his breath.

Read Text:

It happens all the time. A batter reacts angrily to a pitch that hit him or came too close. He glares out at the mound and both benches are poised to pounce onto the field. If the batter goes after the pitcher, both benches will empty, the bullpens will empty and in a matter of seconds, baseball looks like hockey. If the batter does not respond with anger, words may be exchanged from the benches, but calm prevails.

What if you could freeze time? What if, just as the batter picks himself up from the ground, everything else stops and the batter's wife comes out onto the field and she says, "Babe, that was a terrible thing that the pitcher did. Lord knows, I want to take your bat and hit him with it. But everyone knows he plays dirty. We also know that you don't. And your boy and girl are in the stands today and they are watching you right now and they will take their cues from you on how to respond when someone throws shade their way. What you do right now will either reinforce your instruction or will destroy it. I know the kind of man you are. I know the heart that you have. I know the influence that you have had on so many other people. I know that you don't want to throw all that away because in a moment you let your pride overrule your values. This may be one of the hardest things you have ever done, but I am praying that you will take your base and let the game go on. God will take care of him.

Proverbs 15.1 says, "*A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*" Here, Abigail is the soft answer that David needs. Nobody but Jesus has it all together every day. People who are generally givers of mercy also need mercy, because sometimes, like David, they are just tapped out. It is why we all need Christ. It is also a great lesson for our church. There are times when the Lord uses someone else to pour mercy on you. They pray for you, encourage you, come alongside and help you, maybe even correct you, and in a sense they believe for you because it feels your faith tank is out of fuel. But, then, they need help. They need you to pray for them, encourage them, come alongside of them, help them, correct them or believe for them. We can often see what others should or should not do with more clarity than with ourselves. We all blind spots. We all need Abigails. Givers of mercy, like David still

need mercy. Here is the good news. God provides mercy. God loves to provide mercy. One of the texts that you should memorize is 1 Corinthians 10:13. *"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."*

1. **God provides mercy.**

David is at this breaking point and Nabal's shameful treatment is the straw that breaks the camel's back. This is a hard lesson and a warning for the ages. The moment David relied upon David instead of God, he started to look just like Saul. No person stands well under pressure in his or her own strength for one second without the grace of God's Spirit. In chapter 24, David gives mercy. Here, David desperately needs it. With fire in his eyes and steel in his spine, David is leading 400 of his men on a revenge tour. He is tired of getting kicked like a dead dog or flicked like a flea. He will teach Nabal a lesson that will be a lesson for everyone else who dares disrespect David. No more, Mr. Nice-Guy! Their swords are thirsty for blood. Clouds were gathering, darkness was moving in.

But David was not the only one mobilizing into action that day. One of Nabal's men who witnessed Nabal's shameful treatment of David's men went and told Nabal's wife what had happened. The worker rightfully feared that Nabal's folly was going to come back on him, but Nabal (v.17) was one of those guys who wouldn't listen to anyone. *"He is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him."* Don't read that too fast. Remember v.2 that says that Nabal *"was very rich"*? He was rich, but he was worthless. Wow! In contrast to Nabal is his wife, Abigail. He was harsh and badly behaved and she was discerning and beautiful. (v.3) Naturally, we all want to know what is a girl like that doing married to guy like him. We don't know. We could speculate that maybe her dad had been too influenced by the dowry, or maybe she didn't have parents who were living. We are never told. But, based on what we do know it is easy to think that God had made a mistake in Abigail's life. In spite of appearing to be trapped in a bad situation, Abigail shows amazing character and skill. She is an OT picture of Christ. She rescues David from David, Nabal from Nabal (for the moment) and Nabal's men from both Nabal and David. No wonder this young man comes to her. He trusts her. She has earned a reputation for discernment. She knows what needs to be done, no matter what, and she does it.

Because the sheep were being sheared and Nabal was getting a lot of money from the wool, he was throwing a party. We find out in v.36 that it was like the feast of a king. This was very convenient for Abigail because food was already being prepared and she knew it and was able to quickly gather a significant quantity of food, got them loaded on donkeys and sent on to meet David and his men in hopes of resolving the crisis before it was too late. The whole thing had to be kept from Nabal and it was. David is described as coming down toward her (v.20) and she is described as coming down under the cover of the mountain.

I love how v.20 ends. "And she met them." It sounds like the young men with all the food were sent ahead. Now, Abigail, alone on a donkey would try to stand between David, his 400 men, armed to the teeth and his mission of revenge. What could one woman do to stop an army out for blood? 400 men were moving, presumably down the narrow road, when all of a sudden, the force of men stops. Why are we stopping? The guys in the back are asking. Word begins to spread through the ranks. It's a girl and she is in the road talking to David. Notice the verbs in vs.23-24: "She hurried and got down" she "fell before David on her face" "She fell at his feet". This was a desperate act by an amazing woman who was not trying to save her own neck but when you listen to her, you realize that she was trying to save David from David.

A. God, mercifully gave David a way out through Abigail.

David was hellbent on revenge. That phrase, "saving with your own hand" (v.26) has the idea of taking matters into your own hand. David had forgotten his promise to let God bring about justice. David was going to take care of this one, but if he did, it would be a terrible blight upon him and his men. Now, Abigail's act of mercy in sending him food may have been viewed as too little too late, but she took that chance and then she laid her life on the line and in so doing she saved David from a major disaster. He could have and would have killed Nabal and his men. News of this massacre would get back to Saul and then the rest of the nation. David would be just like everyone else who gets into power. He was just a thug, a murderer who could not be trusted to keep his emotions in check. Abigail saw this. She saw what David did not. She had a vision for his kingdom that even David lost sight of. In v.28 Abigail knows that the LORD is going to establish for David a sure house. Saul is not going to have a dynasty, but David will. She is certain of this and knows that what David does today will affect his dynasty. Mercifully, she saved David from David.

B. God, mercifully gave Nabal a way out through Abigail.

Nabal's shameful response would have gotten him killed. Abigail could have stood aside and let it happen. Who would have blamed her? In a culture where women like her were often trapped in situations like this, this could have easily been her ticket out. But, in rescuing David from David, in risking her own life to save David from himself, Abigail knew that she was saving the life of her worthless husband. Nabal may have been rich, but his wife was out of his league. He did not deserve her and he had no clue what he had in her. By laying her life on the line, she saved his and gave him a chance to realize what kind of a person he was and change.

C. God, mercifully gave Nabal's men a way out through Abigail.

Nabal's arrogance threatened all of the men in his household. Abigail's humility and sacrifice saved them. You see why the young man came to Abigail. He knew that they were in trouble and obviously he knew that Abigail cared about them. Abigail saved their lives that day. Rescue for David from David, for Nabal from David and for the young men from David came because Abigail offered gifts and ultimately herself to David.

Abigail is an amazing preview of and picture of Christ. Her language is full of propitiation. She is the innocent one who pleads with David to consider her to be the guilty one. "On me alone, my lord, be the guilt." Let me bear the blame. She is asking to be credited with the blame even though she had nothing to do with the offense. She is choosing to take credit for a wrong that she did not commit so that wrath could be appeased. Let me carry the offense. Look at her. She is beautiful, innocent, vulnerable, humble, loving, alone and risky. She laid her life on the line so David wouldn't destroy his own. That is what Christ has done for you.

D. God gives you a way out through Christ.

Like David, we think that our sense of justice is right and that we can make our own laws and enforce them. But we are sinners. Like Nabal's sheep, we have gone astray, every one of us. We are blinded by our sin even while our sin condemns us. God would be perfectly just to stand by and let true justice take its course, but God is merciful. Even in wrath he remembers mercy. While God will not compromise his righteousness and holiness, he provides you with a way out of condemnation. He gave you a way out through Christ. Christ went to the cross alone. He laid down his perfect life as a sacrifice of atonement that paid in full for the sins of every single person who would ever trust in him. The beautiful, innocent, humble, loving, Son of God, made himself vulnerable to shame, to scorn, even to death in order to appease the just and righteous wrath of the Father. By accepting the sacrifice of his Son, God has no judgment left for you. This is what Abigail displayed.

E. God gives you a way out through others.

God has not only mercifully provided you with a way out of hell and condemnation through his Son, but he continues to provide you with ways out of other temptations. Sometimes God allows us to hear our own words through others. Some of you parents have had this experience when you've said or done something that you shouldn't and your kid says, "Didn't you tell me that was wrong?" What do you do? Hopefully, you thank God for God using your kid to remind you of what you need to hear in that moment. And this really comes out when you are teaching your kid to drive, right? When you listen to what Abigail says to David in chapter 25 it sounds so much like David's speech to Saul in chapter 24.

The Lord gives you an off-ramp, even a lifeline from going down a wrong road. The question is, will you take it. This message may be one of those for you right now. Some of you are contemplating a bad decision. You may even have made plans to pursue a relationship that is wrong, or a habit that is destructive. The Lord has kindly warned you about blowing up your life by tweaking your conscience, or bringing people into your life who have said things, or put you here under the influence of this text. Your emotion, drive, passion, desire, whatever you call it, feels like a fire that wants to rage, but you know it isn't right, but you don't want to hear it. Yet, the Lord has given you an Abigail who stands in your path and pleads with you because in this moment, she cares more about you, than you do or sees what you don't yet see. What will you

do? Will you stop and consider the kindness of the Lord in bringing that person your way? Will you stop and consider the kindness of the Lord in giving you an offramp?

On the other hand, some of you are called to be Abigail and you know that you need to try to be the peacemaker or mediator. In either case, if you are going to be the source of mercy or are going to receive mercy, it demands humility.

2. Both givers and receivers of mercy must be humble.

A. Abigail's discernment is displayed in her words and works

Notice the provisions: 200 hundred loaves, two skins of wine, five sheep (already prepared), a little over one bushel of parched grain, 100 clusters of raisins and 200 cakes of figs. It is a sizeable gift, but not enough for 600 men for sure. Abigail had to get enough that would make a statement, but not too much that Nabal would notice. Then, she has them put on donkeys and sent on ahead of her to David. We don't know how the gifts are received. But it seems that they may have had at least some affect, because Abigail is able to talk David out of his plan and she is able to do this in front of his men, which was no easy thing. But, notice what she says and how she says it. This is a great example of humble mediation.

- A posture of deference (23-31)

Abigail assumes the position of a servant who cares deeply about the life and reputation of another. We've noted how she is willing to step in between and take the blame in an effort to appease, but notice the respect that she displays. I counted 13x that she says, "my lord" which is quite different than Nabal's accusations and insinuations of David. In addition to that 6x she refers to herself as "your servant." This posture of deference and respect really calms David down because he was violently angry over the disrespect his men and he had been shown.

- A request to ignore (25)

Specifically, she makes a request in v.25 in which she identifies with David's perspective. She understands his frustration. David is right about Nabal. He is a brute. He is a terrible person. David, we all know it. I know it, I am married to him. Don't bother with him. He's not worth it. He is worthless. He is hopeless. He won't listen to anyone. Consider the source David. Don't soil your reputation over the likes of him. David, you are bigger than he is. Ignore it.

How many times have professional athletes worth millions of dollars snapped at a fool in the stands who is drunk and is mouthing off? There are people in your life who have no sense, no maturity, no standing and they get under your skin because they disrespect you or others. You may need to just ignore them and accept the fact that it is not your job to teach them a lesson or change them.

- An appeal to God (26)

Abigail then brings God into the picture by pointing out to David that God has providentially put Abigail in his path to help him avert this disaster. Is your plan really what God wants you to do? Wow! That is such a good question to ask and to consider.

- A tangible gift (27)

David, will you accept this gift from me? This is SO good because you really can't accept the gift without accepting the giver, right? If you have offended someone, and you are seeking to reconcile, never underestimate the impact of a thoughtful gift. How can David accept these provisions from Abigail and not listen to her? This is great strategy. Then...

- A request for forgiveness (28)

Notice how direct this is? Please forgive the trespass of your servant (Abigail). She is asking David to lay down his sword because of her. She has taken the blame and is asking for forgiveness. If David forgives her, he cannot continue with his revenge tour.

- An appeal to consider the long-term consequences (29-31)

David, you can do this, but how will this be viewed by your people when you become king? David, fight the Lord's battles, not yours. If you fight the Lord's battles, the Lord will honor you, but if you stoop to fight your own, then you are going to make a mess. She concludes by saying, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

B. David's heart is revealed in his willingness to be corrected. (32-35)

Abigail's humility and mercy sets the pace for David's humble, thankful and merciful response. Abigail is an instrument of mercy in David's life and he in turn becomes an instrument of mercy to her. We will pick it up here next week.