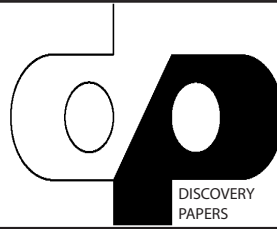


ALMOST FOOLISH

**SERIES: A LIFE OF PASSION:
THE STORY OF DAVID.**



Catalog No. 20151101
1 Samuel 25:1–44
13th Message
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November 1, 2015

1 Samuel 25:1–44

Several years ago, I purchased an old ski boat. It was a way for my large family to have something active to do together. But I had never owned a boat before, so I made a lot of rookie mistakes my first few times using it.

As we started taking the boat on ministry trips, we went camping at a lake in the Central Valley with the Young Adults group. Our campsite was right by the water, so we put the boat in and I was able to anchor the boat right by shore and leave it there overnight.

I barely slept that night. I wasn't even sure I had put the anchor in correctly. I was nervous all night that the boat would lose its anchor and drift away. I had already made plenty of mistakes. I didn't want to add another to the list.

Finally, the morning came. I came out of my tent to look for the boat. I'll tell you what happened a bit later.

This morning we're continuing in our ten month series on the life of David called *A Life of Passion*. David has been anointed king by the prophet Samuel. But the current king, Saul, is chasing him and trying to kill him out of jealousy. David is on the run. He is a fugitive.

Last week we saw David at his best. God gave Saul into David's hand. David had the opportunity to kill Saul and escape this time of tension where he was in between. But instead of taking Saul's life, David trusted God with his plans and his ambition. He showed this remarkable combination of honor, patience, and political intuition by sparing Saul and honoring the position of the king.

The David we'll meet as we look at 1 Samuel 25 this week seems like a completely different person. He is presumptuous, reactive, angry, and vengeful. He flies off the handle after being provoked. David reacts to a situation and is almost foolish, but not quite.

The natural question to ask is why David changes significantly between the story we looked at last week and the story we are reading today. What happened

that made him act this way? This will be the first surprise of today's story—how quickly David goes to a really dark place.

I think our text will help us to understand why. We will see an event that will help us to understand his transformation. Something happened to David that made him lose his anchor. He was adrift. This is what I was worried about for the boat overnight. This is what happened to David.

The second big surprise this morning will be how David is saved from that dark place. He doesn't actually do anything foolish. David comes close, but something happens that helps him to back away from the edge.

Walking through David's story this morning will be very helpful for us because the same kinds of things happen to us. We, too, can rapidly go from moments of brilliant integrity to foolishness. We can think we are fine and then all of sudden, everything changes. We react to situations in ways that surprise ourselves.

How does that happen? And more importantly, how do we recover from our foolish tendencies?

David's example is going to help us understand why we act in surprising ways, but also how we can recover. Ultimately, we will see how God can intervene in these moments and what it takes to recognize his voice.

The Lost Anchor

Our chapter begins with a simple announcement that at first seems to have nothing to do with the rest of the story.

1 Samuel 25:1a: "Now Samuel died. And all Israel assembled and mourned for him, and they buried him in his house at Ramah."

This event is understated by our narrator, but it is incredibly significant. Samuel has died. Samuel, the child born to barren Hannah, who grew up to be the last judge of Israel and anoint Saul as the first king. Samuel, who then told Saul that the kingdom

was being torn from his hands. Samuel, who secretly anointed a forgotten eighth son shepherd boy to replace Saul.

This Samuel died. And everyone moved on.

But think about David. Think about how this must have impacted our fugitive on the run. I think what must have really affected David is that Samuel was the one who had told him who he was; David's identity had come from Samuel. Samuel anointed him as king. Samuel was the voice of God in David's life. He protected David. The place that David went to when Saul started his murderous rampage was Saul's house.

Samuel was David's anchor. And now he was gone. David had lost his anchor.

Has that ever happened to you? Have you gone through something where you feel like the rug has been torn out from under you? Have you ever lost something significant from your life? Have you lost an anchor?

With Samuel gone, David probably wondered whether anyone would believe that he was supposed to be the next king. What if the anointing had died with Samuel? What if no else was on his side? What if there was no one left to protect David? What if? What if? Without Samuel, David is vulnerable. Without Samuel, who is David at all?

Most of us go through changes that can seem to affect our very identity. We graduate from school and start a job. We change roles or companies or careers. We have children or watch children grow up and leave or lose a child unexpectedly. We get married or a marriage ends or we lose our spouse.

We can easily feel lost in those kinds of changes; to wonder who we are and who God is. What do we do when we've lost our anchor?

As the story continues, we will see that David does not handle this change very well. We are all wondering who he is without Samuel. Our story gives us the answer.

Beware the Spark

At this point, two new characters enter our story. They will show us David in a new light. One is a foolish man, the other a wise woman.

1 Samuel 25:1b-3:

Then David rose and went down to the wilderness of Paran. 2 And there was a man in Maon whose business was in Carmel. The man was very rich; he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. He was shearing his sheep in Carmel. 3 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; he was a Calebite.

Nabal and his wife Abigail are described as polar opposites. Abigail is described as “discerning”—literally having good insight—and beautiful. She is good inside and out. Nabal is portrayed as harsh or severe and “badly behaved”—literally having evil actions. He is bad inside and out.

The narrative makes it clear that we should like Abigail, but be suspicious of her husband.

David is on the run with 600 men, but they have been helping people along the way. We saw this last week when they saved the city of Keilah. Now we discover that David has been helping this rich, foolish man. He decides to ask for some kindness in return.

1 Samuel 25:5-6:

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. 6 And thus you shall greet him: ‘Peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have.’”

It is a reasonable request. The feast day was a time when whole communities would gather for a massive celebration. Rich landowners would often host such gatherings. David was merely asking to be included in the festivities. He emphasizes that he wants to bring peace.

David is hoping for a little kindness. Last week we saw the citizens of Keilah betray him and the Ziphites try to cash in on him. Then his own men didn't understand why he wouldn't kill Saul in the cave. Now Samuel has died and David is feeling a bit lost. He wants some affirmation.

We've heard about Nabal though, so we're worried that this situation will not end well. Here is the answer.

1 Samuel 25:10-11:

And Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants these days who are breaking away from their masters. 11 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?"

You know the kind of people that always seem to know exactly the right thing to say at just the perfect time? That is not Nabal. He is the other guy. He is the guy that walks into a tense situation and says the one thing that can make everything explode. He says and does the worst possible thing at the worst possible moment.

David responds by telling his men to strap on their sword. His full intention is made known later in the story when the narrator uses a flashback to show us David's state of mind. We'll read that flashback here to get a feeling for how David reacts.

1 Samuel 25:21-22:

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. 22 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."

Last week Saul praised David for returning good for Saul's evil. Now David is complaining that his good has been met with evil from Nabal. And David is ready to return evil for evil. This is a different David. He continues his speech by cursing in God's name with a vulgar reference to men. It has been sanitized in our translation as "*one male*", but the KJV states the reference more literally as "*any that pisseth against the wall*."

Gone is the patient, honorable David who spared Saul's life. This David is reactive, coarse, vulgar, and violent. What has happened? Last week we were stunned by David's integrity and patience. Now we see a foul-mouthed, angry, violent madman. How do we make sense of this?

My kitchen stove runs on gas. When you turn it on, there's a clicking sound as the igniter makes sparks until it lights. Usually it is pretty quick: click, click,

click, light. But sometimes—and with one of the burners in particular—it can take a long time. So much so that I usually use a lighter for that burner.

But if I don't, it clicks for a long time: click, click, click, click, click, click, click... and with every click I start to get a little more nervous. I think about all the gas that is building up and wonder what will happen when it finally does light. I am tempted to turn the burner off, but I also don't want to reach for the knob if there's about to be a fireball in my kitchen.

David has lost his anchor. He is wondering who he is without Samuel. The gas is building up. He wants someone to re-affirm him. So he asks for kindness. Nabal knows who David is. Everyone in the nation knows at this point. But he asks, "Who is David?" and compares him to a runaway servant. Nabal is being ignorant and mean.

And that becomes the spark that creates a fireball. Nabal's question plays into the specific insecurities that David was already feeling. That spark ignites David.

It is helpful for us to recognize what is going on here, because this is what often happens to us when we lose our anchor; when we forget who we are and we are in the middle of some insecurity about our identity, we are vulnerable. We can be prone to reacting in surprising ways. But if we recognize those times, we can look out for them. We can beware the spark.

Most of us have probably had this experience. We say or do something and somebody responds very differently than we would have expected. It seems to us that the response comes out of nowhere. Why are they so upset over what just happened? Why the huge reaction?

This happens all the time in marriage and with families and roommates and close friends. We never really know what someone else has gone through. We don't have visibility into their emotional state. So we say and do things and we often do not really understand why people are reacting the way they are. But there is always a backstory. There is always more going on than we are aware of.

Do you know that feeling? Maybe sometimes you are the spark. You say or do something that makes another person erupt. Other times you are the one who is set off and someone else is the spark.

It helps to realize when you are in that kind of a place where a spark might set you off. It helps to explain your actions to others afterwards. It is not an excuse. It does not justify anything. But it can help to explain. Realizing when we are in a vulnerable place can make it so much easier for us to interact with others.

Whether you are the kindling or the spark, you can beware the spark.

A Wise Woman

David has erupted, but one of Nabal's servants is savvy enough to see what is about to happen and try to help. He knows that going to his master is pointless, so he goes to his master's wife, Abigail. You get the feeling that this is not the first time Nabal has done something stupid and Abigail has had to clean up the mess. He tells Abigail what is about to happen and she goes into action.

First, she prepares a gift for David.

1 Samuel 25:18-19:

Then Abigail made haste and took two hundred loaves and two skins of wine and five sheep already prepared and five seahs of parched grain and a hundred clusters of raisins and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on donkeys. 19 And she said to her young men, "Go on before me; behold, I come after you." But she did not tell her husband Nabal.

If you remember your Old Testament history, this scene might remind you of an earlier episode. Esau and Jacob were the twin grandsons of Abraham. After fourteen years of being estranged from each other, Jacob returns and sends a gift just like this ahead to his brother Esau. Abigail's actions have the effect of comparing David to Esau, the father of the Edomites, the enemy of Israel. Is this who David wants to be? Just like Esau?

Remember the state of mind that David is in. Esau actually received Jacob graciously, but David is on a rampage. This is the part of the story that we are shown the flashback to David's foul-mouthed, violent tirade. What kind of a woman tries to intervene between an angry warrior bent on violence and an ignorant, mean-spirited fool?

A brave woman. A really brave woman. The fact that Abigail tries to step in front of this runaway train should give us incredible respect for her. When she does catch up to David, her speech is brilliant. We are going to read the entire speech because in Hebrew narrative, the dialogue tells the story of who a character is.

1 Samuel 25:23-31:

When Abigail saw David, she hurried and got down from the donkey and fell before David on her face and bowed to the ground. 24 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. 25 Let not my lord regard this worthless fellow, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. 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. 26 Now then, my lord, as the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, because the LORD has restrained you from bloodguilt and from saving with your own hand, now then let your enemies and those who seek to do evil to my lord be as Nabal. 27 And now let this present that your servant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who follow my lord. 28 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. 29 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. And the lives of your enemies he shall sling out as from the hollow of a sling. 30 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, 31 my lord shall have no cause of grief or pangs of conscience for having shed blood without cause or for my lord working salvation himself. And when the LORD has dealt well with my lord, then remember your servant."

Abigail is brave and smart. Her actions are symbolic and powerful. Her words are brilliant. She takes responsibility for her stupid husband's decision, which had nothing to do with her at all. She uses language to remind David of his victory over Goliath with a sling which came from the LORD. And she points to the future, reminding him that he will be the king.

But her main point hinges around two things that she is helping David to avoid: what she calls “*bloodguilt*” and “*saving with your own hand*.”

She wants to keep David from unnecessary, unjustified violence. Kings are supposed to protect people, not use their power to carry our personal vendettas. That is what Saul has been doing: pursuing David into the wilderness. Does David really want to be like that?

She also wants to keep David from “*saving with his own hand*.” David should know that it is God who saves. In Deuteronomy 32:35, God states, “*It is mine to avenge. I will repay.*” This idea that God is the one who executes justice lies at the very heart of what it means to be his people. Of all people, the king has to live by that principle.

This is exactly what was so impressive about David last week. He refused to kill Saul in cold blood, recognizing that as bloodguilt. And he refused to take matters into his own hands, trusting God to be the judge instead. But now David has lost his anchor and seems to have forgotten.

Abigail steps in to remind him. David has forgotten who he is because of Samuel’s death. She reminds him that he is going to be the king and he ought to act like it. But she also reminds him of who God is. God is the one who saves, not the king. It’s a perfectly balanced reminder of David’s identity.

You are the king, but God is the one who saves even the king.

Thank God for people like this. We need people like this in our lives. People who remind us of who we are. People who remind us who God is and how he acts, especially when we’ve lost our anchor. Especially when we’re vulnerable and confused. When you’ve lost your anchor, listen for people like this.

What I like about this story is that it acknowledges that when we lose our anchor, we might go crazy a little bit. But God gives us opportunities to recover. We just have to listen for them. When we wonder who we are or what God is doing, wait for him to remind us.

That reminder often comes through the voices of the people in our lives. The tricky thing is that we do not always welcome it at first. I have noticed that when I am acting the way that David is acting here, part of me

likes it. Part of me wants to give myself over to rage or lust or anger or self-pity. I want to charge forward and ignore anyone who might stand in my way.

But God often intervenes. Whether through a friend or a colleague or a family member, someone becomes the voice of God for me. There is always the option to remember. To come back to who I am and who God is. The question is always whether I can listen.

Can you? When you have lost your anchor and you are about to do something foolish, do you allow yourself to be reminded of who you are and who God is? Can you listen for the voice of God?

Don’t Save Yourself

The question in our story is whether David can listen. Will he allow Abigail’s words to penetrate his murderous rage? Listen to the next verses to see what he says.

1 Samuel 25:32-33:

And David said to Abigail, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from working salvation with my own hand!”

David is incredible. What a transformation. From coarse vulgarity and violence to an awareness of the presence of God and the wisdom of this woman. He recognizes that God has sent her. He is grateful to God for doing so, and he realizes that her two warnings are critical for him to heed. She has saved him from bloodguilt and from saving himself.

How many angry violent men do you know who are so easily reminded of God and his purposes?

Here is the answer to our question of “who is David.” This is the kind of king David is going to be. He will make mistakes. He can be unpredictable and reactive. But he is correctable. He knows how to repent and be changed and listen to the voice of people around him. Over and over again, David will listen to people around him. Women, generals, prophets, children, and beggars. He will listen to all sorts of people.

And he will change his mind. He will let other people change him. The opposite is true of Abigail's husband. In fact, when he finds out that his wife stepped in to save David, this is what happens.

1 Samuel 25:37:

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.

Nabal cannot stand the idea that he needed to be saved by his wife, so he dies inside. Ten days later he dies for good. Nabal died because he couldn't stand the idea of his wife saving him. He couldn't stand the idea that he needed someone else to help him.

On the other hand, David not only listened to Abigail, he asked her to become his wife after Nabal died. He knew he needed someone around him who could do what Abigail did for him. He needed people who would be the voice of God in his life and save him from himself.

All of this really comes back to Abigail's warning for David. He was about to save himself, but she warned him not to. It's not just that he let God save him by judging Nabal. He also let God save him by listening to his voice, spoken through Abigail. David was humble enough to let this woman save him from a huge mistake.

What about you? Do you try and save yourself? Do you think you're in charge of bringing justice to those who have hurt you? Are you unwilling to listen to the voice of people in your life who warn you? Are you more like Nabal or David?

This story is a warning. It's a warning about what can happen when we lose our anchor. A warning about how easily people who do honorable things can slip into dark places. A warning against trying to save yourself. Listen to this warning. Don't save yourself.

At first, that language might not resonate well with you. You probably haven't called forth 400 armed men to murder the household of someone who insulted you. But think about those times when you felt you had lost your anchor. What do you do when you're in a vulnerable place like that? What if someone insults you or disrespects you or ignores you?

There are many ways that we save ourselves in those moments. We are certainly tempted to return evil for evil; to take revenge against people who have hurt us; to defend our honor or attack someone else. It's easy to justify these things by saying that they started out. That's what David.

But maybe you are more passive. You do not attack. You retreat. You pull away from people. You disengage. You hide from others, from God, and even from yourself. You tell yourself that you cannot trust anyone. You are tired of being hurt and you are just not going to do it anymore.

What does it look like for you to save yourself? How are you tempted to do that? When you lose an anchor, what makes you vulnerable? How do you save yourself?

Brothers and sisters, God is our anchor. He gives us our identity. Remember what he says in Isaiah 43:1, "But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.'"

This does not mean we are not affected when things happen. It can still be disorienting to lose all the little things that anchor us in small ways. We are not expected to be unaffected by the ups and downs of everyday life. But as we go through these times, we can cling to God as our anchor. We do not have to save ourselves.

Conclusion

Remember that camping trip I took with the young adults and the boat? Remember how nervous I was, wondering if the anchor would hold and the boat would be there in the morning? Well, when I looked for the boat that next morning, it was there. Right where I had anchored it.

In fact, it turned out that I had a different problem. At the end of the weekend, when it was time to leave, I could not get the anchor up. It was lodged so solidly, that I snapped the rope trying to raise it. After all of that, I did end up losing my anchor. Just not in the way I thought.

The same thing happened for David. Abigail helped him to rediscover his anchor. He recognized how much he needed that and she became his wife.

1 Samuel 25:43-44:

David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel, and both of them became his wives. Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Palti the son of Laish, who was of Gallim.

After meeting such an incredible woman in Abigail, why are we told that he takes another wife? Why are we told now that his first wife Michal was taken from him?

This may be a foreshadowing of some trouble to come. Yes, Abigail helped him rediscover his anchor. But perhaps David will end up relying too much on women in his life. Perhaps women will become like an anchor that is stuck for him. An anchor that at one point was helpful, but something that he clings to. Perhaps this tendency will catch up with him later in life.

And of course, we know that it will. The story of Abigail and Nabal foreshadows the later story of Bathsheba and Uriah. At the end of both stories, a man is dead and David is married to the man's former wife. In this case, the woman has helped David to avoid a huge mistake. In the case of Bathsheba, which we will get to in several months, nothing can save David from himself.

When David loses his anchor, Abigail helps him find it. But we have seen a side of David that scares us. He is capable of more than we realized. We walk away with a fuller picture of David. And a fuller picture of ourselves.

Have you lost an anchor? Are you feeling vulnerable and unsure of yourself? We need to be careful in these moments. Recognize how vulnerable you are. When you get to that place, beware the spark. Look out for that thing that might set you off. Listen to the voice of God in the people around you. Don't get defensive. Allow them to remind you who you are and who God is.

Above all, don't save yourself. Let others in. And let them point you to God. The LORD is the only one who saves. Only God, through Jesus, can save our lives and our souls. When you've lost your anchor, don't be foolish. Let God save.