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Sermon

Biblical Marriage

1 Samuel 25:1-31, 35-39; 1 Corinthians 7:1-9; Mark 10:2-16

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As we follow David, we have heard how Saul has turned violently against him and hunted for him. A fortnight ago, we heard that David had Saul's life in his hands. Saul entered a cave unaware that David and his men were present. David was urged to kill Saul by his men, but instead he cut off part of the hem of his robe. Afterwards, David was conscience-stricken for taking even that action against the anointed king. He calls out to Saul from a distance showing that he could have killed him but did not and for a time Saul turns from persecuting him. Last week, we heard from the same time period about David's men getting water for him from Bethlehem in spite of the Philistine occupation. And now another test of David's character comes along – another training for a future king.

The scene is set about 30km south of Bethlehem. You have heard the story. David and his men have protected Nabal's shepherds and flocks from dangers – "they were a wall around us,"¹ says one of Nabal's servants. This is not a protection racket - the Mafia take payment not to bring destruction, rather David provided real protection against Philistine and criminal elements. David may not be accepted as king yet, but he thinks like a king protecting his people where he can. David had not done it on a contractual basis, he is simply asking for some of the rewards of the harvest - something he was entitled to under laws of hospitality and legal provision for outcast and landless people.

Nabal does not react well to this request – but boorishly and insulting refuses. David's men for all their dubious origins are well enough trained to make no response but take the message back to their master. David's blood boils. Taking up arms he sweeps out with 400 men to avenge the ingratitude swearing that he will kill Nabal and all his men.

Meanwhile back at the ranch, Nabal's wife, Abigail, is told what he has done and seeing the danger they are in, she sets out to disarm David. Sending large quantities of food ahead of her, she meets the war party and prostrates herself before him.

Here is a masterly handling of the situation. The food has gone ahead of her. No doubt the smells wafted from the containers: freshly baked bread, roasted grain. Hungry men push forward appreciatively only to boggle at the sight of this beautiful woman humbling herself before their leader. She accepts full responsibility but makes sure he knows it was really her foolish-by-name-foolish-by-nature husband. She

¹ 1 Sam 25:16

manages to assume immediately that he will no longer need to attack, saying, "Now ... the LORD has kept you, my master, from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hands..."² She further increases the pressure on David to receive the gifts by saying in the hearing of the men, that the food is for them.

Here are three powerful personalities: Nabal, a rich man, boorish, rude and to have achieved his wealth perhaps something of a bully; David with force of character and inclined to be impetuous; Abigail – decisive, wise with a well-honed ability to flatter and cajole perhaps developed in dealing with a boorish husband.

Do you fit into any of those categories? Perhaps you are inclined to flare up and threaten dire actions. Or are you quite stubborn and demanding with others? Could you be the one to see how to avert danger, how to talk an angry opponent around? Do you want to be who you typically have been? The good news here is that God is training David and he can train you too – will you let him?

At this point Abigail moves into a prophetic role. God inspires her words with more than human significance. She speaks of David's promised future as leader of Israel and the promise of a dynasty – a promise which God has not yet otherwise made to David. She urges him to remain righteous in his dealings lest he carry "the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself."³

She even weaves into her speech reference to Saul's unjust pursuit and the assurance of God's care: "Even 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."⁴

And is it an accident that she refers to the lives of his enemies being hurled away like a stone from a sling? Just think what these words would mean to David. When the army is hunting him, here is someone offering hope and assurance. She even uses illustrations which resonate with his past experience of God's deliverance from Goliath. That is one way God validates his word to us. He makes reference to events we will recognise so that we know it is him and we can be encouraged in our circumstances.

Have you given a prophetic word like that? Have you received a prophetic word like that? It is immensely encouraging when you do. At New Wine in January, Guinny went to a workshop on prophecy. They had an exercise where two lines of people stood back to back, then one line was shuffled. The first line had to ask God for a prophetic word to give to the person behind them. Guinny had a word about having a baby. When she turned around, it was a woman past child-bearing years. Naturally, she thought she had got it wrong, but the woman said she was very concerned for her daughter who could not conceive and was having treatments. The woman decided to take Guinny's prophetic word as a promise. In short order, the daughter became pregnant, and yesterday they sent this photo to Guinny – the fruit of her prophetic word!

Church, God loves to speak to us and encourage us and he often wants to use ordinary people to pass on his words let's not miss all the opportunities he gives!

Well, Abigail cools David's wrath and he relents. What has he learnt? Again as in the cave, don't act prematurely – let God sort it out in his way and time. Are we prepared to do that or do we have to control everything.

In this case, the resolution is not long coming, Nabal has a stroke the next day and dies 10 days later ... and David asks Abigail to marry him.

Has David grown through this incident? I think the answer is yes. In the next chapter there is another encounter between Saul and David where once again David could kill Saul – but he does not hesitate now, he just takes a water jug to prove he was there and retreats to tell Saul from a distance that he chose not to kill him. The same principle applies, let God avenge - David has learnt his lesson. Sometimes we need to apply the same lesson in our lives. It is not easy to withhold your hand when you could grasp what you have been promised or feel you should have. But it is better to let God give it to you in his time and way.

² V26

³ V31

⁴ V29

I would like to turn briefly to consider marriage given the introduction given by David and Abigail and the current public debates. David's marriage to Abigail was polygamous (she was his third wife). This was allowed under Old Testament law although regulated to provide some protection for the women. It was, however, not encouraged and by New Testament times had almost died out.

When we look at the New Testament readings, we find both Jesus and Paul define marriage as permanent and specifically between one man and one woman.

A bride to be went to the jewellery shop to have the inside of her fiancé's ring engraved. She couldn't decide what to say and so asked the shop assistant for advice. "I want something that has meaning and will remind him of me," she said. The assistant suggested, "How about: Put it back on!"

Marriage is to be permanent. An M.C. at a wedding reception asked guests who had been married the longest. One couple had been married over fifty years, so he asked the wife, "What advice would you give the newly married couple?"

The woman replied, "The three most important words in a marriage are, 'You're probably right.'"

The MC then asked the same of the husband. "She's probably right," he sighed. I guess that ties into mutual submission.

Both Jesus and Paul refer back to the creation account where God is recorded as giving Eve to Adam as the original, divine purpose and intention for marriage.

It is not same-sex marriage – both clearly state marriage is between a man and a woman. And furthermore, the Genesis account of the first couple includes the command "Go forth and multiply" – which means that procreation is a part of the purpose something only possible in heterosexual union.

Although in ancient times, cultures practiced polygamy it was not in God's original design or purpose. We find in the New Testament, monogamy is a condition for church leadership in the qualifications laid down for deacons, elders and bishops. Because church members were urged to follow the example of their leaders it applied to all Christians.

In the epistle, Paul responds to a statement from the Corinthians, "It is good for a man not to marry."⁵ Some wanted to impose celibacy on all. In response, Paul advocates faithful monogamous marriage or if one is called to it, celibacy. Like Jesus, he lays down the condition based on the Genesis account of creation that marriage is between one man and one woman. Each man shall his own wife not sharing her with other men and to avoid any confusion each woman shall have her own husband – not sharing him with several women.

Paul is talking about marriage and naturally refers to sexual intercourse. Marriage is the one place which is a good holder of sexual practice. It reminds me of the man who said, "I walked into my living room the other day to find my son sitting in front of a roaring fire. It was worrying as we don't have a fireplace." Fire in the room is good for heating but it needs to be safely contained. Sex needs committed marriage to contain it safely.

In the gospel reading, Jesus quotes directly from Genesis 1:27 & 2:24: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them," and "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."

Here we have God incarnate, affirming words from the inspired writings saying how it is designed to be. You can't get more authoritative than that! One man, one woman, leaving, cleaving, united into one flesh.

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⁵ 1 Cor 7:1