

❖ Sin of Nabal ❖

We are going to read through a rather lengthy passage, but we need to be familiar with the details to understand the lessons to be covered.

I would like to start with a short contemplation. We need to understand what the term “immoral” means. We tend to think of this term as basically applying to a certain class of sins. This is not the case.

Let’s say you went to bed and suddenly remembered you hadn’t brushed your teeth. You are so tired you decide to skip it for tonight. That is a decision you are free to make. There may be consequences, but it is not a sin. It is not something immoral. On the other hand, when we take an action that is a sin, it crosses the line and becomes immoral. To be immoral, something has to cross the line and become sin.

What we need to see in the following account of David, Abigail and Nabal is that a great crime was committed. We read this story and are amazed as we sense the immediate danger, hoping for Abigail to quickly save the day. We note God’s hand showing His verdict at the end but tend to be confused as to what was so bad about what Nabal did. That is what we need to focus on.

Before we read it, I want to point out that what Nabal did was “immoral.”

1 Samuel 25:2-39

2 And there was a man in Maon, whose possessions were in Carmel; and the man was very great, and he had three thousand sheep, and a thousand goats: and he was shearing his sheep in Carmel. 3 Now the name of the man was Nabal; and the name of his wife Abigail: and she was a

woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance: but the man was churlish and evil in his doings; and he was of the house of Caleb. 4 And David heard in the wilderness that Nabal did shear his sheep. 5 And David sent out ten young men, and David said unto the young men, Get you up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and greet him in my name: 6 And thus shall ye say to him that liveth in prosperity, Peace be both to thee, and peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou hast. 7 And now I have heard that thou hast shearers: now thy shepherds which were with us, we hurt them not, neither was there ought missing unto them, all the while they were in Carmel. 8 Ask thy young men, and they will shew thee. Wherefore let the young men find favour in thine eyes: for we come in a good day: give, I pray thee, whatsoever cometh to thine hand unto thy servants, and to thy son David. 9 And when David’s young men came, they spake to Nabal according to all those words in the name of David, and ceased. 10 And Nabal answered David’s servants, and said, Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master. 11 Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be? 12 So David’s young men turned their way, and went again, and came and told him all those sayings. 13 And David said unto his men, Gird ye on every man his sword. And they girded on every man his sword; and David also girded on

his sword: and there went up after David about four hundred men; and two hundred abode by the stuff. 14 But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal’s wife, saying, Behold, David sent messengers out of the wilderness to salute our master; and he railed on them. 15 But the men were very good unto us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we any thing, as long as we were conversant with them, when we were in the fields: 16 They were a wall unto us both by night and day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep. 17 Now therefore know and consider what thou wilt do; for evil is determined against our master, and against all his household: for he is such a son of Belial, that a man cannot speak to him. 18 Then Abigail made haste, and took two hundred loaves, and two bottles of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, and an hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on asses. 19 And she said unto her servants, Go on before me; behold, I come after you. But she told not her husband Nabal. 20 And it was so, as she rode on the ass, that she came down by the covert of the hill, and, behold, David and his men came down against her; and she met them. 21 Now David had said, Surely in vain have I kept all that this fellow hath in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that pertained unto him: and he hath required me evil for good. 22 So and more also do God unto the enemies of David, if I leave of all that pertain to him by the morning light any that pisseth against the wall. 23 And when Abigail saw

David, she hasted, and lighted off the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, 24 And fell at his feet, and said, Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be: and let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak in thine audience, and hear the words of thine handmaid. 25 Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal: for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him: but I thine handmaid saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send. 26 Now therefore, my lord, as the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, seeing the LORD hath withholden thee from coming to shed blood, and from avenging thyself with thine own hand, now let thine enemies, and they that seek evil to my lord, be as Nabal. 27 And now this blessing which thine handmaid hath brought unto my lord, let it even be given unto the young men that follow my lord. 28 I pray thee, forgive the trespass of thine handmaid: for the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house; because my lord fighteth the battles of the LORD, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy days. 29 Yet a man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul: but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the LORD thy God; and the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out, as out of the middle of a sling. 30 And it shall come to pass, when the LORD shall have done to my lord according to all the good that he hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have appointed thee ruler over Israel; 31 That this shall be no grief unto thee, nor offence of heart unto my lord, either that thou hast shed blood causeless, or that my lord hath avenged himself: but when

the LORD shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thine handmaid. 32 And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: 33 And blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand. 34 For in very deed, as the LORD God of Israel liveth, which hath kept me back from hurting thee, except thou hadst hasted and come to meet me, surely there had not been left unto Nabal by the morning light any that pisseth against the wall. 35 So David received of her hand that which she had brought him, and said unto her, Go up in peace to thine house; see, I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person. 36 And Abigail came to Nabal; and, behold, he held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king; and Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken: wherefore she told him nothing, less or more, until the morning light. 37 But it came to pass in the morning, when the wine was gone out of Nabal, and his wife had told him these things, that his heart died within him, and he became as a stone. 38 And it came to pass about ten days after, that the LORD smote Nabal, that he died. 39 And when David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, Blessed be the LORD, that hath pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal, and hath kept his servant from evil: for the LORD hath returned the wickedness of Nabal upon his own head. And David sent and communed with Abigail, to take her to him to wife.

When we think of the holiday of Thanksgiving, we think how good

a holiday it is. It does something which we instinctively know to be good and right. To thank God is something pure. We need to understand that giving thanks does not only apply to God, it also applies to man.

The opposite of giving thanks is ingratitude. As good and high as being grateful is, so as dark and ugly is ingratitude. It is not like simply choosing to skip brushing our teeth tonight, it is something immoral. You see, brushing our teeth is a choice, pleasant or unpleasant, but being grateful is not really a choice. It is something that morally crosses the line into an, and here's that nasty word, "obligation." When someone does something good for us, we are under a certain obligation of gratitude. Please note – I am not referring to being obligated to those who do something for you with the intent of making you obligated to them. That is a vile act in itself. It is a use and abuse of people. A form of manipulation and that is immoral!

Going back to Nabal. We may not tend to see the great crime that Nabal committed, but understand it or not, we do know it was clearly understood by the witnesses who saw what David and his men had done for Nabal in the past, saw how he answered David's messengers, the testimony of Abigail and finally of God Himself.

This mass of testimonies is sufficient for us to know that Nabal's response was a great sin. We can also see from the full weight of what was said that this was the sin of ingratitude.

We know the young man who reported the account to Abigail was aware of all the good David and his men had done for them and testified that it was a great blessing. He knew that such ingratitude on Nabal's was about to bring big trouble.

Abigail knew the situation was bad as well. When she met with David, she gave clear knowledge

of exactly who David was. She knew of his being chosen of God to replace King Saul. She knew a grievous injustice had been committed and openly called it “iniquity” in verse 24.

Seeing the testimony of David, and his reaction to the scorn he received through his messengers to Nabal; seeing the young man, who ran to Abigail, give his testimony to Abigail; seeing Abigail’s response and speech to David; and finally seeing God smote Nabal with a coma for ten days, ending in death, we can clearly see how great the evil of this ingratitude was. We see the debt of obligation to show gratitude was upon the shoulders of Nabal.

There is another serious point we need to pay attention to. Carefully consider what Nabal’s response was:

10 Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master.

11 Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?

Are we to believe he was ignorant of who David was? Abigail clearly knew of David’s background. We even see the hint to Nabal’s knowledge of who he was from the reference to “*servants breaking away from their master.*” The critical point I want us to see is, Nabal didn’t only show ingratitude, he also had to make his ingratitude appear as something righteous! He had to slander David, who truly was a righteous one, and flip the tables to make it appear David was only a rebel. Being a rebel as such would be accusing David himself being immoral.

Nabal’s continued speech of ingratitude finished with a question of self-righteousness. In a paraphrase we find Nabal basically saying, “Seeing how David is really just an immoral rebel, it would be morally wrong

for me to give any of my goods to him when I should be giving it to my hard-working employees. You see, I really care about them and seeing they are properly rewarded for all their hard-work.”

Oh, don’t Nabal’s words just ooze of a self-righteousness? He wants to paint himself as a real caring boss. The public loves to see such appearances in the workplace. They love to give their business to those companies who treat their employees well. We even see chocolate and coffee packages with “fair trade” certification to help consumers buy the product with a sense of comfort that no workers were exploited in the production of the product. We like to know that and prefer buying products that show they care about such issues. This is good, so here we see Nabal making his appeal to being virtuous. Oh, this Nabal is indeed one who knows how to manipulate things to look, to the gullible, like he is a man of virtue.

What can we learn from this? Be aware that the true ingrate will present similar sounding speeches posing his or her position as one of justice and righteousness while insinuating the one who is wronged is actually the immoral one.

As the account of Nabal comes to its grand finale, we see God gave the final judgment on who was just and who was wicked.

God didn’t leave Nabal to go on as before. God’s judgment of the crime was made clear. If there was any doubt as to how serious this crime of Nabal was, it is cleared up when we see God killed Nabal for it. In God’s eyes, the ingratitude was a death penalty offense.

I want to take a look at another verse. It is a word from King Solomon, David’s son. Solomon would have known Abigail personally and would be even closer to the lesson of Nabal, Abigail and David than we could ever hope to come. With that in mind, consider this proverb of Solomon:

26 Also to punish the just is not good, nor to strike princes for equity.

Proverbs 17:26

At first glance, I now you are not going to see how this verse has anything to do with ingratitude. We will have to look at the Hebrew to get the point. The first half of the verse is a parallel to the second. It is a form of Hebrew poetry. The one half helps to expound and explain the second.

It is the clarity of the first half that helps clarify the second. For illustration purposes, let us take a step back in time to Puritan Massachusetts. I expect you have all seen the wooden stocks where they would put the condemned person for a period of time. It held their hands and head in line. The public offender would be sentenced to abide a certain amount of time locked up in their public shame for some particular crime. Such punishment was effective in discouraging the conduct that got you there in the first place.

Now consider that for an innocent person to be sentenced to such a public shame is gross injustice.

My wife’s distant ancestor was a citizen in Massachusetts. He refused to help in the persecution of a Quaker. The town was under Puritan governorship. For his refusal to help in that particular case of persecution, he was given a fine. This ancestor later became a Quaker himself. I suspect the injustice in the treatment of the Quakers made him take a more serious look at what they were. He knew such punishment of those who helped people holding to their Christian convictions was not good. Undoubtedly, this caused him to become disgusted with the system of those implementing such punishment of the just. This gives us a view of the first half of Proverbs 17:26.

In the second half, we need to

look at “strike.” The word can be either used for a light strike, or affliction of any kind or a more severe strike. The term does not indicate the degree, but does indicate a wounding of some kind.

The next word to note is נְדִיבִים “ndivim.” Properly, the root word means “voluntary; willing, noble; subst. for a noble.” In relation to a prince, it is a term that was used like we use the term “public servant” for elected officials. Unfortunately, such an attitude seems to have become something of the past, but the idea is still found in that old expression.

The Hebrew also has another term for prince that denotes the position of authority as in dominion, like Sarah, Abraham’s wife is named in the feminine, “Princess” of this term. We need to understand why Solomon chose this word for volunteer rather than that for dominion. He wanted us to focus on the aspect of the volunteer. Someone who is doing a service for others out of sheer freewill. He is not doing it for money or prestige or for power.

The last word to look at is יָשָׁר “yosher.” That is translated here as “equity.” It literally means, “right, meet, upright.”

The “for equity” is a construct indicating the aspect of “upon it.” In this sentence we see the person, who is being especially noted for his “voluntary” position, is suffering some affliction because of his upright service. Now this affliction is not because the work is hard, but because of oppression. Instead of such being appreciated and rewarded for their upright, voluntary contribution, they are suffering some loss. In this parallel to the first half of the verse, such is compared to that person who was put in the stocks unjustly or that distant ancestor who was fined

because he helped the persecuted man or woman who feared God.

Such could be likened to rounding up volunteers to help some association or group put on a convention. The people who volunteer should be shown appreciation. When they get to the place where the convention will be held, how scandalous it would be to charge them the convention entry fee to come in and help run the show. Such treatment would smack of the ingratitude shown by Nabal, and we know what God said of that in His killing Nabal. Instead, they should be given a free lunch as gratitude. How could we say something like, “We would like your help so will let you in free but if you look at anything while you are there, you will be charged. Oh, by the way, thank you for your help but don’t expect us to give you any benefits.” Wow, does that mirror Nabal’s treatment of David!

One further point of consideration. If we were to charge such volunteers and the world found out that those naming the name of Christ treated their volunteers in such a way, what a blaspheme that would be to the name of Christ or in the case of an association, a slander upon the cause for which the association operates. Let me tell you this, I’ve gone out and asked the unsaved if charging a volunteer to come in and help was fine, I can tell you, the unsaved know better. Even the unsaved have a standard of morality built into them that tells them such treatment is immoral. Some may be confused as to whether or not Sodomy is right or wrong, but they know that the ingratitude shown to such volunteers is outlandish. Seeing the world instinctively knows better,

shouldn’t our standards at least be above theirs?

Unfortunately, we all fail in one way or another in showing proper gratitude. We simply take way too much for granted, but that’s no excuse for not striving to correct this. We need to become servants of God who endeavor to be more grateful.

As far as this issue of showing appreciation, there are more Scriptures that enrich upon this subject, but for now I suspect we have seen enough to help walk in a truly grateful manner. Let us close with this last quote on a lesson of gratitude. You should note, it was the outsider who remembered to be grateful. Those bearing the name of being one of God’s people all failed the test:

11 And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. 12 And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: 13 And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. 14 And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went they were cleansed. 15 And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, 16 And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. 17 And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? 18 There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. 19 And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.

Luke 17:11-19

