

## Turn Away From Evil And Do Good

*Psalm 34:1-14; 1 Samuel 25:1b-35*

So every year at Vacation Bible School, I try to learn the same verses we ask the kids to learn, working on the theory that's what's good for kids to learn is also good for old men to remember. And this story about Saul and David and Nabal and Abigail has always been one of my favorites. Because it's complicated. The people you would expect to be heroes in this story have all managed to go wrong.

The first man wrong was Saul the king. Old king Saul had started out Israel's greatest hero since Joshua. Saul had started by almost single-handedly rescuing an entire city of Israelites from destruction. He was Israel's first king, a great political and military leader. And Saul was a great father. He raised a crown prince who was both brave enough to tell his father he was wrong, and loyal enough to die by his father's side anyway. But in the end, king Saul had run afoul of God and gone mad and wasted the last years of his reign betraying and hunting David.

Second man wrong was David the giant-killer. The Bible calls David "*a man after God's own heart*". No one would overtake David for goodness or greatness until Christ was born a thousand years after him. But this story finds David at a desperate stage of his life. He was a fugitive from King Saul, who had hunting parties all over the landscape looking to run David down. David was as far from Saul as he could get, down on Israel's desert border with Egypt, and he had an arrangement with the local tribesmen that he would protect their flocks, if they would keep his men in provisions and not betray him to Saul.

Third man wrong was Nabal, who was fabulously rich, thousands of sheep and goats, but who somehow still managed to be a stingy, mean hearted, nasty minded fool, who never measured right from wrong or good from bad but only thought about gaining his own advantage. And so when Nabal heard that David needed provisions, he figured "Why?" Nabal let David guard his shepherds and sheep all season, figuring that David was so weak and in so much trouble that he, Nabal, could welch on the deal and get clean away with it.

It turned out to be a fatal miscalculation on Nabal's part. Nabal had hinted to David that, if he tried anything, Nabal just might turn David over to one of Saul's hunting parties. But instead of scaring David away, Nabal's hint only made David more desperate. That very night, David organized a hunting party of his own, determined to do Nabal in before Nabal betrayed him to the king. All of Nabal's slaves knew that their master had done David wrong and they were all in deep trouble. But no one knew how to tell the fool he wasn't a genius.

So they went to his wife, Abigail, whom the Bible describes as “*intelligent and beautiful*”. Abigail was way too smart to waste any time warning Nabal about his folly. People who have to be right are impossible to warn, and the richer they are, the less they listen. So Abigail took her chances with David, who already had the respect of the slaves he had protected in the country-side. She spotted David as a good man, and brought him the provisions that he and his men so desperately needed. And she pleaded for the life of her husband, whom she neither liked nor respected. But if Nabal was a fool, he was her fool and so she pleaded for him over and against her feelings.

I think in God’s eyes, Abigail was the hero of this story. It was she who expressed grace to an undeserving husband and it was she who had the courage to stand before David, sword and all, and remind him that a man after God’s own heart has live out something better than fear and outrage. The kid’s verse was as follows: “*Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.*”

The point being that trouble is easy to find, upset and heartbreak and mistrust and outrage are easy to cultivate. But Jesus went to a cross and died in our place to set the wheel turning in a different direction. It follows that to be forgiven by God is to be willing to forgive others even when the outrage is real and the injury still hurts.