

Making Peace

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[0 : 0 0] Thank you very much, Margot, and good evening, everyone. Good to see you here this evening. I want to begin with two questions. Question one, if you could win any award in the world, what would it be?

What would you choose? Anything. It doesn't matter where you've got the talents, not anything. If you win it, what would you want? So you might say an Oscar, a Grammy. If you're into football, the Ballon d'Or. Maybe one of various halls of fame. If you're in this country, become a knight or a dame, whatever.

However, I'd suggest that the most prestigious award to win in our world is a Nobel Prize, and in particular a Nobel Peace Prize.

If you win a Nobel Peace Prize, you've been recognised by a very distinguished international group of judges as being someone who's made a real contribution to peace in our world.

Someone who has made a big difference for good in our world. And so past Nobel Peace Priziers include people like Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Nelson Mandela, and others who are famous, and lots and lots I suspect most of us have never heard of.

[1 : 1 0] But all of them have this, that they were recognised as being peacemakers. We'll think about one of them towards the end of the service. Question two. What is the highest compliment that anyone could pay you as a Christian?

What is the highest compliment anyone could pay you as a Christian? I thought of two answers to this. One is to say that you're like Christ. That's what we want to be as Christians, isn't it?

We want to become more and more like our Lord, to become daily more like Christ. And the second one, which really is equivalent, is to be called a child of God.

We sang about that in our first song this evening, didn't we? Being a child of God. Now all of us, if we know the Lord Jesus, are children of God, purely by his grace and by the great love that he lavished on us, as John reminds us in his epistle.

But there's also a sense in which we can be recognised as children of God by what we do and by how we act. People look at us and they see something of the character of God in us.

[2 : 2 0] What is the kind of thing that might make people think that? Well, we don't have to think too hard because we have the Lord Jesus to tell us. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God. Those who make peace, who bring an end to conflict and who are able to bring peace into whatever situation they are, are those who are both in our world recognised as being very good people and also spiritually, if they know the Lord Jesus, are recognised as being God's children.

And this evening we're looking at a peacemaker as the key character in our chapter. A lady called Abigail. Like a lot of characters in our Bible, Abigail comes on the scene, she's there for a short period and then we hear virtually nothing of her after that.

She's only mentioned ever again as the wife of David or as the mother of some of his children. And yet in 1 Samuel chapter 25, she stands out as someone of outstanding wisdom and insight and spirituality and a really great example to us.

Now we can learn a lot from Abigail this evening about what it means to be a peacemaker, about what it means to be God's children in our world.

[3 : 49] Before we dive into the chapter, just a little bit of context. Although it stands alone quite well, 1 Samuel 25 obviously is part of the wider narrative of Samuel.

Just one or two things to note from that. The chapter is bracketed by three weddings and a funeral. Funeral at the beginning is the funeral of Samuel. Samuel who is probably the greatest Israelite since Moses, certainly since Joshua.

The greatest of the judges, a priest, a prophet and the one who anointed the first two kings of Israel. And Samuel now is gone. That's significant.

Although Samuel's relationship with Saul had largely broken down, to some extent Samuel is probably still a restraint on Saul and certainly an encouragement to David as the one who had anointed him and would give him the assurance that he remained God's choice for the king of Israel.

So Samuel is gone. At the end of the chapter we have the three weddings. Now we're not going to get into polygamy here and the rights and wrongs of it. God's planned out there is one man and one woman, but that's not the way it was in those days.

[4 : 57] And we see three weddings. One of them is David's wife being taken away from him by Saul. Michal, his wife, who is Saul's daughter, was taken away and given to someone else in marriage.

And David has two weddings. And the significance of these two weddings is that he marries women from the tribe of Judah and so confirms his political status among the tribe.

He is seen as one of them. And when it comes to being king later on, it's Judah who first recognised David. And no doubt what happens in this chapter, to some extent, has an influence on that.

More broadly, as we look at the chapter in the context of 1 Samuel, we see it as somewhere where David is confirmed in his knowledge that he will be the king. And he is also challenged.

And it is a maturing process for David, as he is led to recognise the wrong that he almost did and to understand a bit more about what it takes to be God's chosen king.

[5 : 57] So it is a chapter of some significance in the book, but we don't want to focus on that this evening. Let's focus on the narrative and let's see what we can learn from it. So we have, first of all, what I've called the truculence of a miserly man.

Truculence is someone who is very awkward, almost for the sake of being awkward, and is very aggressive in their dealings with others. And I think that's a good description of Nabal.

So the first thing we learn about Nabal in the early verses of the chapter was that he was very wealthy. Before we even know his name, we're told about his wealth, the thousand goats and three thousand sheep that he had.

He was a man who in this world's terms had done well. And yet when we come to verse 3, and we find out a bit more about Nabal, the comment on him was that he was a surly man and mean in his dealings.

And that wasn't just the opinion of the writer to Samuel. As we go through the chapter, we find that his own servants, his wife, David, everyone has a similar view of Nabal, that he is really an idiot, a fool, and someone who is really difficult to deal with.

[7 : 17] A very unattractive character. But it's this man that David comes looking for help. David and his band of men, quite a big band by this stage, as we saw when he put his army together, they were dependent on the goodwill of people like Nabal.

They were outlaws. And they were dependent on others to be able to provide with them with what they needed. And they had made this deliberate decision. They weren't going to take things for themselves.

So David very deliberately had taken nothing from Nabal. Rather, he had protected Nabal's flocks and made sure that others didn't come and take from them. And so David sends a very polite message to Nabal.

And it really is polite. He talks about himself as Nabal's son. He talks about what he has done for Nabal. And he very politely asks, well, at this time of festival, when you're rejoicing at all that you've been given by God, can you spare something for me and for my men?

And Nabal, if he was in tune at all with the traditions of Eastern hospitality, of Middle Eastern hospitality, he would have provided for David. That was what you did.

[8 : 31] If someone came to you and needed you, didn't send them away, you provided for them. But Nabal was having none of it. And Nabal made these really rude and quite violent comments about David.

Who is this son of Jesse? As if he was a nobody, someone people had never heard of, even though he was a national hero, not just for killing Goliath, but for all his other exploits for the nation.

He then talks about him as a servant who's broken away from his master. As if, again, he is a nobody, he is worthless. Why should he help him? And so says, well, why should I give him what I've built up for myself?

I don't want to help this man David at all. He was a really miserly man. And on top of that, he was very aggressive. And at a human level, it's not at all surprising that David got quite upset about it.

To be treated in this way, such a deliberate insult, it was no surprise that David felt, well, I need to go and do something about. It's this. Lesson for us from Nabal, I don't want to dwell on him.

[9 : 48] As Christians, as believers in the Lord Jesus, there are two things I think it is very important we show in all our dealings with others. One is to be generous.

Now, I'll be thinking last few Sundays about that and about your attitude towards money. And we are called to be generous, particularly to those who are in need. And then the second thing I think we're called to do is to treat everyone with respect.

Not to show particular respect to those who have lots of things, to those who are powerful, to those who don't really need it, but to show respect to everyone and to treat them with real dignity.

That, after all, is what our Saviour did. When Jesus was on this earth, he didn't differentiate between people. He treated everyone with respect. And in these regards, we need to be the complete opposite of Nabal.

Not miserly, not truculent, but generous and treating people with real respect and with dignity. So let's leave Nabal behind and let's look at Abigail.

[10 : 56] And I've called this section The Influence of a Wise Woman. So David's servants come back and they tell David what Nabal said. David said, Well, I'm having none of this. Let's get our swords out.

And he takes some of his men and they're on their way to destroy Abigail and to kill all the men and no doubt to take his land and his property as well.

And Abigail hears about it. There's a servant here who has a small but very significant role in relaying to Abigail what has happened and in prompting her into action.

But Abigail, as soon as she hears what's happened, she realises she needs to do something. She can't just let this pass, otherwise disaster is coming on their household.

So she gets all this food together, much more, I think, than David asked for, perhaps expected, and she goes out and she goes to meet David. And as Abigail comes and she talks to David, I think she looks in three directions.

[11 : 58] She looks backwards. She looks at what's happened and she recognises that a wrong has been done to David, albeit she didn't know about it at the time. She recognises a wrong has been done and that that idiot Nabal has done something which is very foolish as well as being very mean.

She looks at the present and she presents to David all the things she's brought with her to try to make restitution for the wrong that's been done and to try to forestall David as he would seek to go and to destroy Abigail.

And then, perhaps most important of all, she looks to the future and she recognises David as the one who is going to be king and she says to him, you can be sure that the Lord is going to be with you.

You will achieve what the Lord has called you to achieve. And she says, well, don't do something stupid now that's going to destroy that. Let me look at it a slightly different way.

Making peace. You'll see where I'm going pretty quickly, I think, in this. What happened with Abigail? So the first thing is that she recognised that there was a danger.

[13 : 11] David's righteous wrath had been ignited and unless something was done, Nabal was going to pay the penalty for the wrong that he had done. As Nabal had insulted David and had treated him very badly, so he was going to face judgement for what he had done if nothing was done about it.

Abigail recognises the danger. Second thing she does is she becomes the servant. She humbles herself.

I don't know if you noticed as we were reading what Abigail said, I think in almost every verse in what she says, she talks about herself as David's servant. Now, Abigail was someone who probably had much higher social status at that point than David did.

She was the beautiful wife of a wealthy man. David was an outlaw and yet Abigail comes and she humbles herself before David and again and again she refers to herself as his servant.

She recognised the danger, she became the servant. Third thing she did was she accepted the blame. Now, there was no blame really attaching to Abigail.

[14 : 27] Abigail. She didn't know what her husband was doing, she had no way of knowing about it and yet it's almost as if she says to David, well, I should have known and should have been able to do something about it.

So in verse 24 she says, my Lord, let the blame be on me alone. So the wrong that Nabal had done, Abigail takes on herself.

She accepts the blame. She then paid the price. She brought all this that was needed to get rid of David's wrath, to make him recognise that what he was doing was a foolish thing and he was given everything he asked for and probably much more beside.

Abigail paid the price to make recompense for Nabal's failure. And then the final thing she did was she pleaded Nabal's cause before David.

She pointed out to him that it would not be right if he took the vengeance that he had intended to. The price had been paid, he had got what he had asked for, it would do him no good, it would do her household no good.

[15 : 41] She pled the cause of herself, her husband and her household. Now of course where I'm coming to on that is that these five things are exactly what the Lord Jesus did as well.

He recognised the danger that we were in, that having rejected God, having insulted God by going our own way rather than his way, we were subject to God's righteous wrath.

The Lord Jesus became the servant. He took on the form of a servant, he lived a life of humility, he humbled himself to come into our world, to live our life and to live it sinlessly.

He accepted the blame, he had done no wrong but he took our sins on himself. He paid the price, he paid the price that we were due for the wrong we'd done, he took the punishment that was ours.

And of course he still pleads our cause before God, pleading on the basis of his righteousness and on his sacrifice for us. So Abigail the peacemaker is a wonderful picture of Jesus the peacemaker.

[16 : 53] So much more of a peacemaker in all that he has achieved. So as we were looking at in Colossians recently, and it'd be slightly selective in these verses but to pick out the bones of them, Colossians chapter 1, God was pleased to reconcile all to himself, all things, by making peace through his blood, that's Jesus' blood, shed on the cross.

Jesus became our peace when he went to the cross and when he took our place, accepted our blame and paid the price that we were due.

Abigail is a wonderful picture of Jesus the peacemaker. And all of us are called to be peacemakers. As I said, we're called to be like Christ, we're called to be children of God and a child of God is a peacemaker.

And as we read through the New Testament, again and again, we're told how important it is that we live at peace with people and that we make peace for others. So Ephesians chapter 4, Paul says, make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace.

Colossians 3, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts since as members of one body you are called to peace. Hebrews 12, make every effort to live at peace with everyone and to be holy.

[18 : 15] Without holiness, no one will see the Lord. James chapter 3, peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

Christians are called to be peacemakers. How sad it is in our churches when people fall out and can't get on with one another and the peace and the unity that we should have is destroyed.

If we have that situation, if we're in that situation ourselves, we need to make peace with whoever it is that we have the problem with. If we see others in that kind of situation, we need to think what can we do to help make peace in our church.

But more widely in our world, Christians are called to be those who pursue peace. And in our workplace, around our homes, among those we associate with, if there are issues between people, then Christians should be those who are able to go in and doing the kind of thing that Abigail did, that our Lord himself did, we should be those who are able to make peace.

So let's resolve to go out and as far as we can to be peacemakers this week. One more thing I want to talk about just now is the providence of our gracious God.

[19 : 33] Because very clearly in this chapter, we see the hand of God at work. And it's pointed out particularly by Abigail as she talks, as she pleads with David.

If David had gone ahead with what he planned to do, it could have been disastrous for him. It would have been something, as Abigail says, that he would have looked back on for the rest of his life and wondered, why did I act in this way with so little provocation?

This, remember, is David, who in chapter 24, and we'll see again in chapter 26, spared the life of his sworn enemy, Saul. He wasn't willing to take the life of Saul because he recognised him as God's chosen king.

And yet he was willing to take the life of Nabal, who'd done a much smaller thing to him than Saul, and alongside that, to take the lives of all those with Nabal.

It would have been disastrous in terms of David's authority to be king, disastrous geopolitically in terms of how he would have been seen in the tribe of Judah and further afield.

[20 : 39] So it was very much God's grace that David was stopped from doing this terrible thing. And stopped by this wonderful, wise woman, Abigail.

As she talks to him, and as she reminds him of who he is, and who he will be, and what the Lord has called him to, and she says, verse 31, my master will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself.

And then David, in verse 32 onward, recognises the wisdom, the good judgment of Abigail, and that the Lord has been in this. What do we learn from that?

One thing I think we need to learn is that we need to be willing to have our faults pointed out by others. If there is something in our lives that is wrong and someone comes unlovingly, graciously, points it out to us, we should examine our hearts and say, is that really the way I am?

And if it is, we should be willing to repent of it and to praise God for someone who cared enough about us to point it out. The other thing I think we take from it is that when we get into this kind of situation, not that we're anything directly equivalent, but the kind of situation where we might be tempted to do something foolish, to defend ourselves, or to get back at someone who has wronged us, we need to remember that we can leave things in God's hands.

[22 : 11] That is what Abigail was saying, isn't it? Even in her reference to Nabal and what she says and what she maybe foresaw would happen to him. Nabal, of course, is dead by the end of the chapter, but it was very much leave things in God's hands.

You don't need to do it yourself. And when someone wrongs us, rather than try to get back at them, really, really important that we leave it in God's hand and know that he is the righteous judge.

Again, in this, we have the example of the Lord Jesus. I thought the verse of the scream, I don't. Let me read it to you. 1 Peter 2, verse 23. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate.

When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. If that kind of thing happens to us, let's not try to take the law into our own hands and to get vengeance or justice at ourselves in that sense.

Let's trust God who knows best and who ultimately is the judge. Finished with, let's come back to the Nobel Peace Prize. As I've said, there are many winners of the Nobel Peace Prize we've never probably heard of.

[23 : 24] And that may be true of last year's winners. I don't know how many of us could say who last year's winners were. I'll tell you. There's a woman from Iraq called Nadia Murad. And there was this gentleman who is from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

His name is Denis Mukwege. Denis Mukwege is a really interesting character. I should say, they both won the Nobel Peace Prize for the work they had done to counter sexual violence as a weapon of war.

And I'll come back to what that means in a few minutes. Denis Mukwege is a doctor who grew up in a Christian home. His father was a Pentecostal pastor.

When he was a boy, he went with his father to another boy who was dying and they prayed with him but there was nothing more they could do. And Denis said to his father, well, why couldn't you help him more, Dad?

And his father said, I couldn't do it because I'm a pastor, not a doctor. And at that point, Denis decided he was going to take up medicine and he was going to spend his life trying to help people and to heal them.

[24 : 32] So he did. He grew up and he took a medical degree and he decided to specialise in gynaecology. And the reason for that was there was such a high death rate after birth among women in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

But as he started to practise, Denis came across a terrible situation. Woman after woman who had been raped and mutilated as part of the war in Congo.

And he decided that he was going to devote his life to helping these women, to helping them physically as a surgeon but also caring for them and helping them on the road to recovery.

And he established a hospital and amazingly about 50,000 women have been through that hospital. All women who had been raped and mutilated as part of the war.

In 2012, Denis decided he was going to take a stand in the country against him. He felt the government wasn't doing enough. And at that point, he was kidnapped and there was an attempt made to execute him, to assassinate him.

[25 : 43] He managed to escape and he went to Europe, to Belgium. While he was there, the woman who had helped raised money for his flight back.

These were poor women who had nothing in this world but they said, it's really important we have this man. And he felt, well, there's nothing I can do but go back. This is God calling me to go back and to help these women.

So he did and he is still there under very armed guard but still trying to help, trying to achieve justice for these women and to help them physically. And he says the reason why he does that is his faith in Jesus.

Let me put up something he said. This is Dr. Dennis Mookwege. He says to Christians, we are called to impact our world for the glory of Christ. In the face of opposition and the devastating effects of sin, we may feel helpless.

What can we do? On one hand, it is true, we cannot change the world around us but God can. And he's calling us to be his agents of transformation.

[26 : 54] We need to be bold and intentional in fulfilling that mandate because God wants to work through us. He calls us to be salt and light in our broken societies.

can I ask that we take that away as something to think about and to ponder on this week. We thought of a woman who very much was salt and light in her society.

We thought of a saviour who was the agent of transformation, as Tenec Mookwege calls it, who came into this world to take our place and to have changed our lives completely.

What can I do in my situation to serve Christ, to be salt and light, to be a peacemaker and to help others?

Probably not going to be that dramatic of the kind of thing we've been thinking about this evening but is there something I can do this week to bring about peace and justice in the area where I am and so to be seen by others as someone who is truly a child of God.

[28 : 04] Let's pray together. Our Father, we thank you for your work to us this evening. We thank you for this woman, Abigail, and for the tremendous wisdom that she had as she was faced with this terrible and potentially disastrous situation and how she was able to be a true peacemaker and to confirm David in his faith and to help him understand more your way and to save her family from imminent disaster.

We thank you more for the Lord Jesus and for the way that he came into our situation and he took our blame and he paid the price that was ours so that we could be at peace with God.

And we pray to help us to be peacemakers to where we are. That whatever situations we may face where there is conflict and where there are difficulties between people, but we may be those who display the character of Christ and are able to be his agents and to work for good in our world.

Help us truly to be peacemakers in whatever situation you have placed us that we may honour and glorify your name. Thank you for our time together. We commit ourselves to you and pray for your blessing throughout this week as we ask in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Amen. Amen.