

INTRODUCTION

Life is full of characters. We have all met people in life who make us laugh; while others make us cry and yet others create fear within our hearts. Life is made up of all types of people some are pleasant while others are simply nasty; some are colourful while others are a little plain and perhaps even boring; some are compassionate while others are simply hard hearted; some are generous while others are stingy and mean.

In this chapter we meet three main characters all of which are different. There are two men and one lady. Of the two men one is selfish and hard hearted while the other one is foolish and then there is a lady who is godly and wise.

1. THE SUMMARY OF THE STORY

The chapter is very long so I do not intend to highlight any of the details that we have already read for I trust you followed the reading carefully; but I simply want to summarise the story for you so that we have the basic outline of what is going on in this chapter. We are told that Samuel died and Israel mourned and he was buried in Ramah (v 1). Samuel's godly influence is over it is the end of an era for Israel. We are told that David moved to Maon where we are told that a wealthy, hard hearted and selfish man by the name of Nabal lived along with his beautiful wife Abigail (vs. 2-3). David knew about Nabal for it seems that his men and Nabal's men had mixed together and that David's men even provided some protection for Nabal's men and sheep (vs. 14-15).

David sends ten of his men to Nabal while it was sheep shearing time on what was clearly the Hebrew equivalent of a fund raising mission. David expected some help in return for the help his men had received but Nabal insulted them (vs. 10-11). When this snub was reported to David he reacted angrily and set off with 400 of his fighting men to exact retribution on Nabal (v 13). However Abigail the godly and wise wife of Nabal had been informed of Nabal's rude rejection of David's men (v 14).

So Abigail sets out loaded with gifts in order to try and intercept David and his men before they could harm Nabal (v 18). She managed to persuade David not to take revenge but to leave it with the Lord and she even managed to get an admission from David of her good judgement and how wrong he would have been to kill Nabal (vs. 23-35). The next day when Abigail told Nabal what she had done in order to save him from disaster he took what appears to be a heart attack and died ten days later (vs. 37-38). Abigail subsequently became David's wife and forsook the comforts of home for a fugitive's life with her new husband and his band of merry men (vs. 39-42) and they lived happy ever after. No! They did not but if it was a fairy tale that is what would happen, but this is real life and real life is never easy or predictable.

Before we move on let us remember what I said last time. This chapter along with the previous one and the next one are all linked together by one main theme. The central theme in all three chapters is that God is the avenger and vindicator of injustices perpetrated against his people. David has to learn that if he withholds the sword of revenge; God will see to it that justice is done that He will act on behalf of his people.

2. GOD'S PROVIDENCES BRINGS HIS JUSTICE

I want to try and draw out some lessons from this chapter by looking at how God's providence actually enabled him to bring about justice. This was done by restraining David from his foolish actions through the godly and wise Abigail. In a chapter like this it is so easy to get so involved with the story that we miss the hand of God at work so let me try and help us to look at the providential workings of God as it is seen in the details of this story. God providence is seen mainly in the way He restrains David his chosen King from acting in accordance with his own impulsive foolishness. God restrains David from doing wrong against Nabal.

Four times the story speaks of God's restraining actions (vs. 26, 33, 34, and 39) and the means that God used was Abigail the wife of the hard hearted Nabal (v 32). That is how Abigail saw her mission (v 26); her actions were the intervention of God. God had intervened in a situation that would have led David to an act of shedding blood an act of vengeance.

This intervention kept David from living the rest of his life with a guilty conscience because of a foolish action (v 31) and David comes to acknowledge this himself (v 34); he comes to his senses and sees just how foolish his thinking was and how God intervened to protect David from his own foolishness.

But the story doesn't end there because God does not intervene only to save David from his foolish actions but in order to make room for his justice. When Abigail goes back to speak to Nabal and tell him what she did; he was too drunk to address him so she waited until the next day and then told him. When Nabal heard what she did, he took a heart attack and notice ten days later he dies as a result of the work of the Lord (v 38).

The passage is making it clear that Nabal's death is not a coincidence but that Nabal's death was an act of God, it was God meting out his justice; it was the Lord taking revenge because of the way Nabal treated God's people and especially God's anointed King David. What does this teach us about God's dealings in our lives?

It surely teaches us that God intervenes in our lives and sometimes his intervention saves us from our own waywardness and foolish actions. God often acts to restrain us from our own sinful plans; He puts obstacles in our way to stop us carrying out our sinful intentions and plans. Often we have a plan that we fully intend to execute; it may seem wise to us; we may consider our action to be a matter of justice but it is a foolish plan because it is a plan that will lead us to sin.

But then God graciously and lovingly intervenes so that He puts hurdles in our way that we cannot get over and we are stopped from carrying out our sinful intentions and actions. God's barriers often lead to frustration and anger on our part, but if we are wise and acknowledge that God is Sovereign and in control of all things then we will learn from his interventions and we will acknowledge our own foolishness and like David praise God for his intervention. Sometimes of course God's intervention in our lives comes from other people. It could be our wife or husband who simply talks sense into us.

It could be a friend who speaks to us and convinces us otherwise. It could be as a result of a sermon and we change our mind but whoever God uses or however He intervenes we ought to see every barrier as coming from the hand of the God who loves us and cares for us. But we must never forget that God is just and although as God's people we have to put up with the evil actions of unbelievers and the opposition of people; ultimately we must leave God to act justly.

We have no right to take things into our own hands to help God out by our own actions; instead we all have to learn to leave vengeance and justice to God because He is perfectly just and will see that his people get justice if not in this world then certainly on that final judgement day. However this passage teaches us that God works out his justice in this world as well as in eternity. This

leaves me thinking how many deaths sudden or otherwise is the result of a direct act of God's immediate justice because of the treatment of his people. Of course we have no way of knowing but we can be sure of one thing every death takes place as a result of God's just action. He gives life to us and He removes life from us. Death is the wages of sin; we all die because we all sin and God's justice involves the death of sinners (Romans 6:23).

However the good news is that although we are all sinners and we all pay the wages for our sin; yet God intervened through Jesus in order to pay the price for our sin so that we can receive the gift of eternal life through his Son Jesus Christ (Romans 6:23). Have you received that gift from God? If you have then God's justice is poured out on Jesus rather than on us, so that we receive grace rather than judgement.

If you have not received God's gift of eternal life then let me urge you today to plead to God for mercy so that He may grant to you eternal life through his Son Jesus Christ. Therefore as we get back to the main lesson let us remember that whatever or whoever God uses to restrain us from our own foolish actions in order to make room for his perfect justice; we ought to recognise God's interventions whether from people or from events and praise him for his mercy to us that is what David did (v 39).

3. GOD'S PROVIDENCES ENCOURAGES DAVID'S FAITH

Not only did the Lord work in providence to restrain David from carrying out his evil plans but He also worked in providence to encourage David's faith. The means of accomplishing both purposes was Abigail; Nabal's wife. We see this encouragement in her words to David. We need to put ourselves into David's shoes; he is the appointed and anointed king of Israel but he has not yet come to the throne.

Saul who is currently King is after David; he is seeking to take his life and therefore David is on the run. He has already had some scary moments and everyday is a struggle as he has to seek food for himself and his band of men. Along with her gift of supplies Abigail assures David that the Lord will certainly make a lasting dynasty for David (v 28).

Even though David's life is constantly in danger from his enemies Abigail assures David that he will not perish at the hand of his enemies but that it will be his enemies that the Lord destroys (v 29). Abigail assures David that the Lord will fulfil his promise and bring David to the throne and grant him success (vs. 30-31). The same providence works to restrain David from sin and to encourage him in the faith. David needed both; he needed to be stopped from doing something extremely foolish but David also needed to be encouraged and assured or reassured that God would fulfil his promise and make him King.

In the Lord's economy He uses the same providence to accomplish both results. In our lives we constantly need to be restrained from our own sinful foolishness but we also need to be constantly encouraged in our faith and reminded that the Lord will fulfil his purposes. It may well be that we need to be reminded that He will fulfil his purposes of justice. As Christians when we look at the world we can see so many injustices, especially the injustices that God's people have to endure.

Christians are persecuted in our world for no other reason than they are Christians. Some are put in prison some are killed; many are denied jobs etc and there are many Christians who cry out to God every day for justice. Will God fulfil his promise to be just? Will God bring his justice to bear? Will He punish sin and those who practise it and demonstrate his justice? When we doubt that God will bring his justice to bear then we are tempted to take matters in to our own hands instead of patiently waiting for the Lord to mete out his justice. In our own nation we may not have to face

such persecution but we still may be in situations where we long for justice. We may lose out financially because we are honest in our dealings whereas many of our neighbours have no scruples about filling in a form incorrectly.

We may miss out in promotion at work because we will not tell lies to cover up for the company. What about the hotel couple who lost their business because of a false accusation made by a Muslim lady. They were found completely innocent by a court of law but they still lost their business because they lost a big contract while they waited for the court case to take place. Will they get justice for the harm done to them?

Do that couple and many others not need to be reassured that God is just and will one day deal justly with this world and will vindicate his people? At other times it may be that we need to be reassured that the Lord is in control of our world and of our lives. Our lives can at times be chaotic especially our working lives but at those times when we feel life is almost out of control we need to be reassured that God knows what He is doing and that He is controlling everything. At those times at just the right time God comes to us through his providence and reassures us of his sovereign control. As we all look over our lives we can see time and time again God's controlling hand; sometimes restraining us from sin and at other times encouraging us in our faith.

When God makes promises He always keeps them but sometimes we need to be reassured of that truth and God graciously does that through his wonderful work of providence.

So let us thank God as David did for God wonderful and yet mysterious works of providence in our lives. Let us praise him that He restrains us from evil and encourages us in our faith and He does that through his work of providence and He is able to do that because He is Sovereign and in control of everything. Let us utter David's words in our hearts as we close "Praise be to the Lord and God of Israel" (v 32).

Amen