

# 1 Samuel 25:1-26:25

## Introduction

One of the great evils we see in the world around us is the abuse of power. It takes various shapes and forms. And we see it everywhere.

Perhaps certain world leaders come quickly to mind, who enrich themselves and preserve their rule though abusing the power they have. But it's not only them. In the world of sport, think of allegations made in recent years by female gymnasts about abuses suffered at the hands of their coaches. Most recently, we might think of the kiss planted on the lips of the footballer Jenni Hermoso as she went up to collect her World Cup winner's medal. In the entertainments industry, think of the allegations that have come to light about people such as the producer Harvey Weinstein and the rise of the MeToo movement. We can look at big corporations, such as the Post Office, and the allegations being made about the conduct of its executives. News headlines alert us to the actions of police officers who have abused those they should be protecting. Church leaders, sadly, have done likewise. We read of people smuggling gangs who exploit the vulnerable and entrap them in modern day slavery. The overbearing boss who bullies his or her staff in the workplace. The husband who uses his strength to control and coerce his wife. The mother who abuses her children.

Abuses of power exist in all areas of life, in a variety of shapes and forms. Wherever human power exists, we find it being abused. And that temptation to abuse power stands behind the events we're reading of in this section of 1 Samuel.

Last week, David was in a position of power in the cave. He could have abused that power by taking vengeance on Saul and killing him. Thankfully, his conscience stopped him. And it's the same temptation for David, once again, in our passage this morning. Again, he comes very close indeed to abusing his power. I've put as our first heading: Two close calls. Or we might say, two *more* close calls.

## Two close calls

Chapter 25 begins with a report of Samuel's death. It's passed over with surprising brevity.

**Verse 1. Now Samuel died, and all Israel assembled and mourned for him; and they buried him at his home in Ramah. Then David moved down into the Desert of Paran.**

Then we're introduced to Nabal and Abigail.

Although we're meeting him for the first time, Nabal is already known to David. Previously, he and his men had come across him and been good to him. David had protected Nabal's shepherds and watched over his flocks to make sure that nothing went missing. He had acted as a king should act, looking after his people. And now that it was a festive time of

year, when the shepherds shear the sheep, David sends his men to Nabal to ask him to give them some provisions.

But David doesn't get the response he expected or hoped for. We're told that Nabal is surly and mean, and that's how we find him. He refuses David's request and hurls insults at his men. David's just another runaway slave, he says. Why should he do anything for *him*? And when they report back to David, he's furious. He tells them to strap on their swords. Then he sets off to avenge himself on Nabal by killing him along with all his men. His resolve to let God avenge the wrongs of his enemies has clearly been forgotten. He's taking matters into his own hands.

Meanwhile, one of Nabal's servants goes and reports all of this to Abigail. We're told that Abigail is intelligent and beautiful. And she acts quickly. She gathers generous provisions and rushes out to meet David. And she gets to him just in time. Steam is still exploding out of his ears. Forget God's justice. He's intent on killing Nabal himself. But Abigail pleads with him to stop. Nabal is a fool by name and a fool by nature. 'Take no notice of him,' she says. 'He's an idiot!'

Apparently, she knows that David is God's chosen king. She begs him to accept her gift. And she pleads with him not to come to the throne *this* way, with blood on his hands. Look at verse 30.

**'When the LORD has fulfilled for my lord every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him ruler over Israel, my lord will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself. And when the LORD your God has brought my lord success, remember your servant.'**

Thankfully, Abigail's wisdom prevails. And David recognises that it is God who has sent her. Her coming has been an act of divine intervention. Look at verse 32.

**David said to Abigail, 'Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgement and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands. Otherwise, as surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, who has kept me from harming you, if you had not come quickly to meet me, not one male belonging to Nabal would have been left alive by daybreak.'**

I wonder how many times God has sent people to us who have reminded us of God's words and challenged our wrong behaviour. That's a brave thing to do. It's not always easy. We should thank God for them. And like David, we should have the humility to admit our mistakes and be corrected. That's what David does. He accepts her gift and grants her request.

Then, when Abigail returns to Nabal, she finds him busy getting drunk. In verse 36, we're told that he's holding a banquet like that of a king. David is the king but acted like a fool. Nabal is the fool who's acting like a king. And it's only when he has sobered up that she tells him what had happened. The news causes his heart to fail and ten days later he's dead. When news reaches David, he again praises God, who has brought Nabal's wrongdoing down on his own head. And then David sends for Abigail and marries her... in addition to his other wives.

The narrator doesn't comment on David's polygamy but merely mentions it. And the chapter ends on that ominous note. We're left wondering what will come of David's habit of taking wives for himself. And those who know the story of Bathsheba will know that it doesn't end well.

God is teaching David that he really *can* trust his justice. He doesn't need to abuse his power by taking matters into his own hands. God will deal with all his enemies, including Saul, just as he has dealt with Nabal. It's a lesson for us all to learn.

Once again, David emerges with a clear conscience. But only just. And only thanks to the God's intervention through Nabal's wife, Abigail. It's been a close call. The next incident, in chapter 26, isn't much better. Once again, the Ziphites are involved. We met them in chapter 23. And once again, they go to Saul to report David's whereabouts.

**Verse 1. The Ziphites went to Saul at Gibeah and said, 'Is not David hiding in the hill of Hakilah, which faces Jeshimon?'**

Once again, Saul goes down with his three thousand men to search for David. This time, rather than running, David goes to Saul's camp to check it out. And then, under the cover of darkness, he and Abishai slip in among Saul's men. We're not told why he does this but perhaps, once again, his anger is getting the better of him. They get as far as Saul himself, lying asleep, surrounded by his soldiers. Abishai recognises that David is in a position of power once again. Saul is in his hands. He can do what he wants with him. And Abishai wants to kill him there and then. But again, David won't let him. This time he seems to remember what he learnt in the cave. Or perhaps what he's just learnt from Abigail.

**Verse 9. But David said to Abishai, 'Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the LORD's anointed and be guiltless? As surely as the LORD lives,' he said, 'the LORD himself will strike him, or his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. But the LORD forbid that I should lay a hand on the Lord's anointed.'**

And then he says, **'Now get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let's go.'**

David's very familiar with this spear... having had it thrown at him more than once. This and the water jug represent the two things that Saul needed to protect and sustain himself. David takes them. And they leave. No one sees them or wakes up because, we're told, God

has put everyone into a deep sleep. David may or may not be aware of it, but once again, we see God's intervention to protect him.

Then, when David's standing at a safe distance, he calls put to Abner, Saul's guard, and accuses him of failing to do his job of protecting Saul. Saul recognises David's voice. Once again, David protests his innocence and insists that he's not a threat to Saul. He curses those who have incited Saul against him. And the chapter ends with Saul admitting his sin and unwittingly identifying himself with Nabal by calling himself a fool. Then he blesses David who, he says, '**...will do great things and surely triumph.**' And the two of them part once more and go their separate ways.

Once again, David has avoided any wrongdoing. He hasn't abused his power. He *is* innocent, as he maintains. But once again it's been a close call. His obedience has only been made possible through God's direct intervention to protect him.

I've called our next heading: The king we need.

### The king we need

And that's because David points us forward.

He is a good king. In many ways he is a model king. He has a close relationship with God. And he seems to get the main things right. So far, he has been blameless. But only just. He is a king who is constantly under the threat of temptation. He may be innocent of wrongdoing but he is very human. As we read these chapters, we get the feeling that his obedience is very fragile. It could fail at any moment. In fact, as we've seen, without God's intervention it *would* have failed. And as we read on into 2 Samuel, we discover that his obedience *will* eventually fail. Although he hasn't abused his power yet, he will do. He will abuse his power as king to steal another man's wife. And then he will abuse his power again by having his own army kill that man to cover up his sin. He is a flawed human being like the rest of us. So, once again, the book of Samuel is pushing us to look beyond David to a better king.

If God is to have an eternal king, who will rule over an eternal kingdom, he will have to be like David but different. He will have to succeed where David fails. He will need to be blameless where David is not. In the language of the Bible, he will have to be without sin.

This story of David is pointing us forward to the king we need. To Jesus. Like David, Jesus experienced temptation. Three times he was tempted in the wilderness, just as David has been. But *his* obedience wasn't fragile or uncertain. It was secure and unwavering. The writer to the Hebrews says that he was **tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin.** (Hebrews 4:15)

And as we read the accounts of Jesus' life in the Bible, we see that he lacked any obsession with power. He came in humility. He lived under God's rule, in complete dependency on his heavenly Father. Sure, he possessed power. Frightening power. Divine power. But he didn't abuse his power or use it to his own advantage. Rather, he used his power to serve. He says in Mark's Gospel, **'the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'** (Mark 10:45) In his letter to the Philippians, Paul writes of Jesus: **...[he] did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant...** (Philippians 2:6-7)

This is God's King. A king who doesn't grasp after power but who lays down his life for his people... for their good and blessing. He is the king we need.

And he is the king we follow. To belong to Jesus is to be like Jesus. To be counted among his people is to live a life that is observably different to those in the world around us. Following him has nothing to do with abusing power for our own gain. It has everything to do with using power to serve others. Just think for a moment what that means. The Bible tells us what it means.

For those in leadership in the church, it means not lording it over others and wielding power as a weapon but humbling ourselves as servants of all. (Mark 10:42-45; 1 Peter 5:1-4). We take that seriously here at Emmanuel. In the next few weeks, I'll be sending out an email, giving you the opportunity to raise any concerns, should you have any. There is no place for the abuse of power in the church.

For those who are parents, it means not exasperating our children with fits of temper and constant criticism but nurturing them in the training and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21).

For those who are husbands, it means not being harsh with our wives but loving them sacrificially, laying down our lives for them, treating them with consideration and respect (Ephesians 5:25-28; Colossians 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7).

For those who are employers or managers in the workplace, it means not bullying and mistreating those under our authority but treating them in a way that is right and fair. (Colossians 4:1).

When we live this way, like David, we show the likeness of our King. We make Jesus visible to the world. And we bring him glory. But, like David, we can only do this by God's enabling. Like David, we are flawed human beings. Very often our own obedience is fragile and uncertain too. We can only walk obediently with God if, like David, God protects us from temptation. As we read this story, we need to remember how like David we are. And as Jesus taught us, we need to pray that our heavenly Father will lead us not into temptation but will deliver us from evil.

Let's pray now.

Loving Father, we want to show the likeness of King Jesus in the world. Yet we recognise that we are flawed human beings like king David. Our obedience is often fragile. So, please help us to turn away from sin and to live the way you want us to live. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.