

PROTECTED

1 Samuel 25:14-17. 32-38

It is becoming more and more clear to many of us that we live in a really dangerous world with many possibilities of being harmed by radical, uncivilized elements of various cultures in the world. The first things that come to mind in our present day environment are such things as terrorists who would use a suicide bomb to kill a crowd of people or might randomly attack unsuspecting people who are shopping or attending a theater or sporting event with guns or knives or even a large truck. Add to that reality, gang violence, the growing threat of a racial war or an economic collapse that might lead to people stealing from each other for survival and we immediately come to the conclusion that we need to protect ourselves.

This is not something new in the overall span of human history. People used to live in walled cities and even today we find communities that have controlled access. We have locks on the doors to our houses and we are constantly reminded to lock our cars to prevent someone from stealing what we might have left in the car or the car itself. In some of the larger cities, merchants hire people to protect their business and sometimes that protection is provided by another criminal element in the society. We could add to this list such things as identity theft, credit card theft, and some would add that we need protection from the government.

The word that just came to my mind is “overwhelming.” We haven’t even mentioned such things as the military-industrial complex and the one-world government proponents. I can remember some sixty-plus years ago that the main thing we worried about was nuclear annihilation from the USSR and people were building bomb shelters in their basements or in public buildings.

With all these threats, we might wonder how it is possible to even go about living our lives in some semblance of normalcy. There are a couple of things that help us in being able to function and the first could be summed in the word “probability.” Even if the consequences of such things are very serious (as in dying) the likelihood that any one of these events happens seems fairly low. The other “thing” that Christians should factor into the equation is our faith in the promises of God that we can rely on Him for our protection when we are walking in His will. This does not mean that we can just go about life without being aware of the potential dangers that exist and not doing the due diligence that imminent dangers require. For example, the people of Israel were encouraged to have proper walls around their cities. Building that wall was not seen as a lack of faith in God’s protection. We should use our seat belts in our cars and not think that we are failing to trust God when we buckle up.

Having a wall and using a seat belt does not negate the need to continually trust God for protection and staying close to Him so that we can benefit from that protection. We may have just discovered the biggest threat of all and that is the tendency we have to wander away from God and do things in our own way rather than make our decisions based on the truth of His word.

Not only do we need to be aware of external and physical threats, we should also pay attention to those things where the physical, emotional, and spiritual parts of our lives intersect. If someone attacks you physically, then we can expect protection under the laws of the land. What about situations when we are disrespected by someone? Do we think that we need to “protect” ourselves and retaliate by showing disrespect for the other person?

If you read news items on the internet news services, there is usually a comments section where various readers can respond to the articles. In many cases these comments will devolve

into accusations regarding the intelligence of someone who had an opinion that was different. These exchanging of insults could be characterized as “road rage” on the “information highway.” Speaking of “road rage,” such incidents are commonly a result of a person feeling disrespected. Many people today buy into the philosophy of “If they hit me, then I will hit them back harder.” This is the philosophy that leads to escalation of conflicts and decades (if not centuries) of animosities between various nations. This is just the opposite of what we saw in Christ on the cross when He said “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.”

In our study of First Samuel, we want to learn the lessons that God was teaching David as he grew and developed from the time God had called him from being a shepherd boy to being the shepherd king. David was presented several situations in which he sensed a need to “protect” himself or his family or even the nation he was called to govern. Some of these situations called for overt physical action as in the case of killing a bear or lion that was attacking the sheep he was shepherding. We also recall the challenge of the Philistines and Goliath where God enabled David to protect and defend the nation. There were other battles against the enemies of Israel where he led others to literally fight off and kill those who attacked people who could not defend themselves.

There were other situations in which David sensed a need to protect himself and yet he was restrained in his response and left the outcome to God rather than avenging himself and then having to live with the consequences of what would have been a poor decision. Three narratives in First Samuel (Chapter 24, 25, and 26) tell us of incidents in which David spared the life of Saul (on two occasions) and a man named Nabal who had shown disrespect to David. In the case of Saul, God used David’s conscience and his sense of respect for the office of the king to lead David to refuse to harm Saul when he could have easily killed him and that would have ended the threat against the very life of David.

The third incident was not a threat against the life of David but it was a case where a rich farmer who was known for acting foolishly deliberately showed disrespect and disdain for David and his ragtag army. The background of this encounter was that David and his six hundred man army were living in the wilderness area just south of the territory of Judah. David and his men had provided some protection for these shepherds against nomadic raiding groups (like the Amelekites) that were also in the area. It was time for shearing the sheep and there were typically big festivals with a lot of food available during this time. Other farmers had apparently helped David by providing provision for his army in the past.

David sent some of his men to ask if Nabal (who had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats) would provide some food for his men during this celebration. This would have been a way for Nabal to show appreciation for the protection David and his men had provided for Nabal’s shepherding business. Nabal showed no appreciation for the protection he and his possessions had enjoyed and showed total disrespect for David even accusing him of being a rebel against Saul. He totally rejected any idea of sharing any bread, water or meat that he prepared for his shearers and give it to a group of people that he did not know.

Such an outright rejection along with the insults enraged David when the ten men he had sent to Nabal came back with the report. His reaction was understandable in terms of the way the world operates. David ordered his men to arm themselves with swords and four hundred of them would pay a visit to Nabal with the intent of killing every male associated with Nabal. Such a violent reaction to being disrespected by a foolish man cannot be justified by anyone.

The really disturbing thing about this is that David had the benefit of the Spirit of God in his life and yet he was vulnerable to such a reaction that clearly originates from a nature that is

incompatible with what we know to be God's way.

Disaster Foreseen – 25:14-17

¹⁴ But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying, "Behold, David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet our master, and he scorned them." ¹⁵ "Yet the men were very good to us, and we were not insulted, nor did we miss anything as long as we went about with them, while we were in the fields." ¹⁶ "They were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the time we were with them tending the sheep." ¹⁷ "Now therefore, know and consider what you should do, for evil is plotted against our master and against all his household; and he is such a worthless man that no one can speak to him." 1 Samuel 25:14-17 (NASB95)

We all should be very thankful that God protects us from our own foolish choices. David was on the verge of doing something that would harm his reputation and actually create more disrespect (that would be well deserved) from many people. This would have been a hindrance to his effectiveness as the king of Israel. Just think, if David had attacked a local farmer, it is very unlikely that he would ever have won the support of the tribe of Judah at a later date.

God's intervention came about by using others to influence David. A young man who worked for Nabal witnessed the disrespectful actions of Nabal to the ten men whom David sent to ask for food. He was able to conclude what might happen or he heard about how upset David was and what was planned. The advice that we are given today from those trying to protect us is "if you see something, say something." This young man was astute enough to realize that telling Nabal would be useless and, instead, told Nabal's wife who was wise enough to take some action to avert a total disaster.

We see the account of what happened in verses 18 through 31. Abigail was used by God to intervene to stop the foolish plan of David to execute vengeance on an evil, foolish man who had showed a lack of gratitude for the help David and his army had provided. She had her servants gather together a lot of food and loaded it on donkeys. They then set off to intercept David and his army as they were headed to where Nabal and his men were shearing sheep.

When she met David, she showed much respect by bowing before him. She apologized for her foolish husband's actions and told David that he could blame her. She then made an interesting statement that the Lord had already kept David from bloodshed and avenging himself by his own hands. Was she able to see a change in David following her request or had she heard about how David had spared the life of Saul on two occasions? Whatever the reason, she credited the Lord with "protecting" David from doing something he would have regretted.

She ended her plea with a request for forgiveness and an acknowledgment that God had given David a lasting dynasty in which there should be no wrongdoing. This was a subtle way of telling David that what he had planned to do was not worthy of what God had called him to be and to do. That is a good message for each of us as Christians. There are times when we will get caught up in taking things into our own hands and we wind up trying to protect ourselves using the ways of the world. We can be sure that such actions are not worthy of whom God has called us to be and of what He would have us to do.

David Relents – 25:32-35

³² Then David said to Abigail, "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me," ³³ and blessed be your discernment, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodshed and from avenging myself by my own hand. ³⁴ "Nevertheless, as the LORD God of Israel lives, who has restrained me from harming you, unless you had come quickly to meet me, surely there would not have been left to Nabal until the morning light *as much as* one male." ³⁵ So David received from her hand what she had brought him and said to her, "Go up to your house in peace. See, I have listened to you and granted your request." 1 Samuel 25:32-35 (NASB95)

Here we see the difference in a person whose heart is basically right and in line with the

ways of the Lord compared to those who are rebellious against God. Although David had gotten off the “path of righteousness” and was tempted to follow the evil way of the world, a word from the Lord brought conviction and got him back on the right way. Those who are far from God and are interested only in their own ideas would find that their pride would not let them change course and they would wind up doing things that only make the situation worse.

If we will also choose to follow God’s way and walk in obedience to what we know to be the clear teachings of His word then we can trust the outcome to God’s sovereign control. When David backed away from protecting or avenging himself and left the outcome to God, we see that God is faithful.

God Intervenes – 25:36-38

³⁶Then Abigail came to Nabal, and behold, he was holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king. And Nabal’s heart was merry within him, for he was very drunk; so she did not tell him anything at all until the morning light. ³⁷But in the morning, when the wine had gone out of Nabal, his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him so that he became *as* a stone. ³⁸About ten days later, the LORD struck Nabal and he died. 1 Samuel 25:36-38 (NASB95)

All that Abigail had done was without the knowledge or consent of Nabal. She had not only been used by God to protect David from doing something foolish, she had also protected Nabal and all the men associated with him from the consequences of what might have happened as a result of his foolish choices. Is there a lesson here for all of us when we suspect that something bad or dangerous is about to happen? Do we have an obligation to take initiative and try to avert a disaster or do we think that it is useless to even try?

Nabal had apparently returned home from the sheep shearing and he was still celebrating by getting drunk. After he sobered up the next day, Abigail told him what had happened and how close he and all his men came to dying. This news was so shocking that he apparently had a heart attack and died ten days later. We can’t know if Nabal was more upset by what Abigail had done or if it was the realization that he and all his men could have been killed that gave him a heart attack.

We could list a lot of lessons that we should learn from these accounts and we probably know these already but we don’t always put them into practice on a routine basis.

We will rarely regret being gracious to other people.

We do need to be able to protect ourselves from imminent danger but we need to recognize the difference in someone trying to shoot us as opposed to someone insulting us.

A wise person recognizes the difference in defending and avenging.

When we take things into our own hands and try to avenge ourselves, it can make things worse and destroy our future effectiveness.

When it is within our power, we should be ready to take initiative to avert pending danger.

We need to be on guard in our lives to prevent being tempted to do things the way of the world.