

Ahab and Naboth's Vineyard
1 Kings 21:1-7, 17-19, 27-29
8 August 2021 HUMC

Abraham Lincoln once walked down a street with his two boys, who were both howling and making quite a scene. A friend happened to come along and asked: "Abe, what's wrong with the boys?"

Lincoln replied, "What's wrong with the boys? The same thing that is wrong with the world. I have three chestnuts and they both want two." It seems like we never have enough and always want more and more.

Last week I spoke about the final day of the Prophet Elijah, but before I move on, I want to look at one more story that involved the prophet. This was the time the prophet confronted King Ahab who allowed an innocent man to be murdered so he could get a piece of land.

This story has so many messages, but what I would like to focus upon are the dangers of greed and the need for repentance. Mike will read 1 Kings 21:1-7.

Sometime later there was an incident involving a vineyard belonging to Naboth the Jezreelite. The vineyard was in Jezreel, close to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. ²Ahab said to Naboth, "Let me have your vineyard to use for a

vegetable garden, since it is close to my palace. In exchange I will give you a better vineyard or, if you prefer, I will pay you whatever it is worth.”

³ But Naboth replied, “The LORD forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my ancestors.”

⁴ So Ahab went home, sullen and angry because Naboth the Jezreelite had said, “I will not give you the inheritance of my ancestors.” He lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat.

⁵ His wife Jezebel came in and asked him, “Why are you so sullen? Why won’t you eat?”

⁶ He answered her, “Because I said to Naboth the Jezreelite, ‘Sell me your vineyard; or if you prefer, I will give you another vineyard in its place.’ But he said, ‘I will not give you my vineyard.’”

⁷ Jezebel his wife said, “Is this how you act as king over Israel? Get up and eat! Cheer up. I’ll get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.” This is the Word of God.

In our text for this morning, our story appears to be a very simple real estate transaction; however this was the situation: The official palace of the northern kingdom of Israel was in the capital city of Samaria. It was located on a hilly, rocky, windy type of terrain.

But King Ahab and his wife Queen Jezebel decided to build a summer palace in the picturesque place called Jezreel. Once their fabulous summer home was completed, King Ahab wanted a nice vegetable garden to compliment his summer palace.

So he offered his next door neighbor cash or land, but Naboth, who was a godly farmer declined. He refused on religious grounds because he believed the land was an inheritance from God. That is to be kept within the family or individual tribe.

When the king received his answer, he went home, got into bed and sulked. Since the king usually got his way, this was a major disappointment and he pouted. When a child pouts, it was not a pretty sight, but it is worse when an adult does it.

And I think we have all seen it. When people don't get their way, they can act miserable or become angry and aggressive. If they go that route, they might raise their voice or name call. Sometimes they will intimidate or belittle.

In their arsenal of tactics, they might become manipulative, write anonymous letters. That recently happened to one of the selectmen over noise ordinance.

Some have learned that they don't have to do the dirty work, but get others to do it. So don't be surprised if they go "**respectable**" and go underground and gather their followers.

These were perhaps some of the tactics Queen Jezebel. She called for a religious fast. That was usually done when the nation was experiencing some problems, drought, etc., something was not right, but the people didn't know what it was. Then the reason came to light, Naboth cursed God and the king, a clear false accusation.

Jezebel orchestrated behind the scene events. She paid people off and had Naboth put to death along with his sons so they wouldn't inherit the property. Which left Naboth's wife a poor widow who had to leave the land and probably became destitute.

So if you look at the main characters in this story. King Ahab was sinful and weak, but responsible for the evil deeds. Queen Jezebel was wicked, manipulative and strong and her followers were accomplices to her evil plans. Unfortunately human nature has not changed.

Today as it was then, there was corruption at the highest levels and it certainly exists in all societies. But it all boils down to greed and control.

I am told that at one time the men, who trapped animals in Africa for zoos in America, found that the hardest animal to catch was the ring-tailed monkey. But for the Zulus in South Africa, their tactic is quite simple and it was based on how the animal behaved.

What trappers did was make a hole in a melon that was attached to a vine. The hole was large enough for the monkey to insert its hand inside to reach the seeds, but not large enough to pull it back out when the hand is full of seeds.

The monkey's fist is now larger than the hole. What the animal did was pull and tug, screech and fight the melon for hours. But it couldn't free itself unless it gave up the seeds, which it would not do. Meanwhile the trappers sneak up and grab it.

It is the same thing with greed and people will go to unbelievable lengths to get what they want.

Back in the late 1890's when there was a gold rush in the Klondike region of the Yukon in Alaska, there was a stampede of

over 100,000 miners to search for the gold and make a fortune. But the harsh winter, disease, fires in the mining huts, gambling, prostitution, crime and failure to make a fortune took its toll and the gold rush fizzled.

Years later, a miner's hut was discovered in a very remote part of the region. What was found were two skeletons and a very large quantity of gold on the table.

There was a letter that documented their final days. It told about the two men's successful discovery of gold, but they ignored the early signs of winter. The more they mined the more gold they found.

One day, a blizzard struck and they could not escape. Their food had run out and they had become so weakened, they died surrounded by all that gold.

Some people today are like those miners. They work for things and other status symbols. But when the hand of death is on them, they don't have much to show for eternal values.

Jesus asks a very important question. **"What shall it profit a person if they gain the whole world and lose their own soul?"**

Also in our Bible story, there is an element of judgment. God was not pleased about what had taken place, so he sent the prophet Elijah to confront the king over his sin.

Verses 17-19, 27-29.

¹⁷ Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite: ¹⁸ "Go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who rules in Samaria. He is now in Naboth's vineyard, where he has gone to take possession of it. ¹⁹ Say to him, 'This is what the LORD says: Have you not murdered a man and seized his property?' Then say to him, 'This is what the LORD says: In the place where dogs licked up Naboth's blood, dogs will lick up your blood—yes, yours!'"

²⁷ When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted. He lay in sackcloth and went around meekly.²⁸ Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite: ²⁹ "Have you noticed how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself, I will not bring this disaster in his day, but I will bring it on his house in the days of his son."

Despite Ahab's wickedness and great sin, God honored Ahab's repentance. That showed the effectiveness of prayer and humble

attitude. If Ahab did not do this, judgment would certainly have come.

It shows that God gave the prophecy of judgment as an invitation to repentance and opened the door of mercy. Ahab properly responded.

And may we humble ourselves if we sin against the Lord and receive the forgiveness of sins. What I find fascinating in all this is that there is no record of Jezebel's humility or repentance.

So if we ever get in trouble, hit rock bottom, we need to follow Ahab's example to repent and experience God's forgive.

Some say Ahab was not sincere and his repentance was not lasting; but in this case he did the right thing. Many years both Ahab, Jezebel and their sons lost their lives in judgment.

Let me close, Abraham Lincoln recognized the greed problem as his two boys fought over a couple of chestnuts. We saw the greed of Ahab and Jezebel which would not stop at nothing until it was satisfied. Let's not forget the lesson of the Ring-Tailed monkey who was determined to keep the melon seeds.

So may God help us so that we not become so desirous of things that it consumes us. And if we stumble or fall, let us confess our sin before the Lord.