

Naboth's Vineyard

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[0 : 00] We're going to read together from the Old Testament from 1 Kings chapter 21. So we're working our way through the stories of Elijah.

And this is God's word to us about what happened in 1 Kings 21. Now, Naboth, the Jezreelite, had a vineyard in Jezreel beside the palace of Ahab, King of Samaria.

And after this Ahab said to Naboth, Give me your vineyard that I may have it for a vegetable garden because it is near my house and I will give you a better vineyard for it. Or if it seems good to you, I will give you its value and money.

But Naboth said to Ahab, The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers. And Ahab went into his house vexed and sullen because of what Naboth, the Jezreelite, had said to him, For he had said, I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.

And he lay down on his bed and he turned away his face and he would eat no food. But Jezebel, his wife, came to him and said to him, Why is your spirit so vexed that you eat no food?

[1 : 06] And he said to her, Because I spoke to Naboth, the Jezreelite, and said to him, Give me your vineyard for money or else if it pleases you, I will give you another vineyard for it.

And he answered, I will not give you my vineyard. And Jezebel, his wife, said to him, Do you now govern Israel, arise and eat bread and let your heart be cheerful?

I will give you the vineyard in Naboth, the Jezreelite. So she wrote letters in Ahab's name and she sealed them with his seal. And she sent the letters to the elders and the leaders who live with Naboth in his city.

And she wrote in the letters, Proclaim a fast and set Naboth at the head of the people. And set two worthless men opposite him and let them bring a charge against him saying, You have cursed God and the king.

Then take him out and stone him to death. And the men of the city, the elders and the leaders who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them.

[2 : 03] As it was written in the letters that she had sent to them, they proclaimed a fast and they set Naboth at the head of the people. And the two worthless men came in and set opposite him and the worthless men brought a charge against Naboth and the presence of the people saying, Naboth cursed God and the king.

So they took him outside the city and they stoned him to death with stones. Then they sent to Jezebel saying, Naboth has been stoned. He is dead. And as soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth, the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money.

For Naboth is not alive but dead. And as soon as Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab arose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth, the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah, the tishbite, saying, Arise, go down to meet Ahab, king of Israel, who is in Samaria. Behold, he is in the vineyard in Naboth where he has gone to take possession.

And you shall say to him, Thus says the Lord, have you killed and also taken possession? And you shall say to him, Thus says the Lord, in the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick your own blood.

[3 : 23] Ahab said to Elijah, Have you found me, O my enemy? He answered, I have found you. Because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord.

And behold, I will bring disaster upon you. I will utterly burn you up. And I will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free in Israel. And I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam, the son of Naboth, and like the house of Baasha, the son of Ahesha, for the anger to which you have

provoked me, because you have made Israel to sin.

And of Jezebel, the Lord also said, The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the walls of Jezreel. Anyone belonging to Ahab who dies in the city, the dogs shall eat.

And anyone of his who dies in the open country, the birds of the heavens will eat. There was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the Lord like Ahab, whom Jezebel, his wife, incited.

He acted very abominably in going after idols, as the Amorites had done, whom the Lord cast out before the people of Israel. And when Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes, and he put sackcloth on his flesh and fasted and lay in sackcloth and went about dejectedly.

[4 : 37] And the word of the Lord came to Elijah, the Tishbite, saying, Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring disaster in his days.

But in his son's days, I will bring disaster upon his house. We are continuing our sermon series on Elijah and Elisha today.

And it's a very long chapter, wasn't it? So well done, Corey, for reading all of that. Let me just get my stuff sorted for a minute. There's not enough space on this little stand.

I don't know what you call it. But my name is Simon. I'm a minister in training here at St. C's. I forgot to mention that in the beginning for those of you who don't know me.

And I have the honor to preach to you today. So let's do that. I also need to put this a little bit up. No offense, Corey. Today we are looking at a story that at least I wasn't very aware of.

[5 : 40] But it's an important story because it shows us the heart of idolatry. It's a study of what our rebellion against God looks like and it shows us the consequences of it and it shows us how distorted and twisted the desires of our hearts can become.

In the letter of James in the New Testament in chapter one, it says that each person is tempted when he or she is lured and enticed by his own desire.

Then desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin. And sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death. We can see this in this chapter in King Ahab's actions, can't we?

How desire leads to sin and then sin ultimately leads to death. But we can also see what righteousness looks like and our love for God's Word.

So we'll talk a little bit about King Ahab and his wife Jezebel and idolatry. And we'll talk about Naboth and the vineyard and righteousness and then we'll try to figure out what to make of all of that.

[6 : 45] So first of all, Ahab, King Ahab. We already know that King Ahab is not a very good guy. We know that he doesn't like Elijah because Elijah is faithful to God and always speaks God's Word whether it's nice or not.

Elijah really is not a people pleaser, right? This becomes quite clear when instead of saying good evening to Elijah, King Ahab says, have you found me, oh my enemy?

Ahab and Elijah are not likely to become friends because Elijah actually represents everything that Ahab hates so much, faithfulness to the living God.

What else do we know about King Ahab? Ahab is married to, let's say a temperamental woman called Jezebel and in this chapter we read that there was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the Lord like Ahab whom Jezebel, his wife, incited.

So we know that not only Ahab is bad but also his wife plays a big part in that as well. And it's here in this chapter that we understand why Ahab is worse than any other king.

[7 : 58] It's not this particular story or this particular instance that makes him so bad. It's more that this whole chapter is representing Ahab's heart.

One commentator puts it like this. He says, Ahab is like David stealing from his neighbor and arranging his death. Ahab is like Cain attacking a fellow Israelite brother.

And Ahab is like Adam eating the forbidden fruit, the fruit of another's vineyard. And all that this shows us is that Ahab loves Gentiles and their gods and he hates faithful Israelites and their God.

He doesn't know how to fight enemies and he doesn't know how to protect friends. In summary, King Ahab completely and utterly fails to fulfill his duties as the king of Israel.

There's a very ironic question in verse 7 where Jezebel asks him, do you not govern the kingdom of Israel? Technically, the answer is yes, Ahab is the king of Israel, but actually no.

[9 : 06] He does not really live up to the standard of an Israelite king. And also, isn't it really his wife who runs things? Isn't it her who takes matters into her own hands?

Slowly we start to understand why the Bible calls Ahab one of the worst kings, if not the worst king. Let me just repeat what I just said.

Ahab loves Gentiles and their gods, in other words, idols, and he hates faithful Israelites and their God. He doesn't know how to fight enemies and he doesn't know how to protect friends.

Now, don't get me wrong, Jezebel is just as responsible for what happened as Ahab is. Right? We see this big sin that has happened. And she is playing a major factor for the idolatry in Ahab's heart. Jezebel actually knows the law of God quite well because, I don't know if you notice this, but she arranges for that false trial for Naboth and she knows that you need at least two witnesses in order to go forth and kill that person.

[10 : 17] And that's from the law of God. That's from Numbers 35, from Deuteronomy 17. So she knows she's familiar with the law of God, yet she hates the law because she doesn't follow it at all.

And she only uses the law to get what she wants. She mocks it. And by mocking the law, she's mocking God. And she's just as responsible for what happened as Ahab is.

The criteria of a king in Israel is always to keep the covenant, to get rid of idols and to love God. Ahab doesn't do that.

And Jezebel doesn't do that. Instead we see something completely different. Instead of getting rid of idols and taking responsibility as the king of Israel, King Ahab behaves like a two-year-old.

He wants a vegetable garden, right? He wants that vineyard to make a vegetable garden out of it. He wants it, but he can't have it. But he really wants it. So what does he do? He goes home. He lives on his bed, refuses to eat, cries a bit.

[11 : 26] That's not what a king does. That's what a child does. King being depressed about a vegetable garden, really. Or is there more going on in that passage? See, a lot of commentators actually point out that vineyards throughout the Bible are often associated with Israel, the people of God.

So for example, in Psalm 80 and in Isaiah 5, very famous passages in the Bible, the vineyard is a symbol for Israel.

But what is even more interesting is that the term for vegetable garden comes up exactly one more time in the Bible. One more time. In Deuteronomy 11 verse 10, in that verse, God is talking and he's speaking about the promised land.

He's speaking about Israel. And he says this. He says that the land that you're entering to take possession of is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come, where you sowed your seed and irrigated it like a garden of vegetables.

But the land that you're going over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, like vineyards, which drinks water by the rain from heaven.

[12 : 42] So do you understand that picture Israel is a land that is watered by God and the rain that he gives Egypt is like a vegetable garden that we water and take care of.

Okay. Do you understand the symbolism here? The author of that chapter is actually going through some difficulties to use those words and to actually mention those details.

So it's constructed carefully here in that passage showing us where Ahab's heart really lies. He doesn't regard the land for what it is. He doesn't care that God is the one in charge for making it fruitful.

He doesn't want to be dependent on God. He doesn't believe that God knows better and that God will provide. No, Ahab wants to be in charge without being hindered by the laws of God.

Does that sound familiar? I can definitely see myself in that, wanting to be in charge without being hindered by the laws of God. He wants to do whatever he pleases to do and when he pleases to do it.

[13 : 52] And just like he hates the true prophets of God because they constantly, constantly keep telling him that he cannot do what he wants to do. He hates the fact that he can't have the vineyard and make a vegetable garden out of it because the law of God does not allow it.

You see, Ahab is like the crowds that followed Moses out of Egypt who wanted to go back to Egypt into slavery and idolatry. It's turning around. It's making Israel back into Cana.

It's doing everything against God's will. It's rebellion against God. And then he sits there like a two-year-old with self-pity, passivity, being angry at God, vexed and sullen, and being angry at

neighbors for actually following those laws.

Now let me say this. The vast majority of us here, you, me, even the most wise and experienced Christians in this congregation are like King Ahab.

Most of us have a tendency to ignore God in order to get what it is that we want.

[15:10] There are a few questions that I have asked myself this last week during my sermon preparation. I'd like you to take a few minutes and to reflect upon that and to answer those questions truthfully.

What are the vineyards in your life that you constantly try to turn into vegetable gardens? Your relationships?

Your career? Your finances? Your house? Your car? Your children? Your secrets? That sin that you have been struggling with for that many years now?

The stuff that you say about your coworker when they leave the room? Your thought life? In other words, which areas in your life would you rather take care of yourself?

Which area in your life would you rather make into a vegetable garden that you water rather than a vineyard that is dependent on God? Why is it that you are reluctant to give every aspect of your life, every aspect of your heart to your God and Creator, to the one who made you, to the one who knows you?

[16:27] What are the ways you have tried to make vineyards into vegetable gardens in your life even today, in the last week, in the last month, in the last year?

And does it frustrate and embitter you when you can't have what you want and you think you know better and you think, but God, don't you see? Makes much more sense.

You know, if you answer those questions truthfully, and I've tried to do that myself, then you immediately see how similar your heart can be to that of King Ahab. Ahab who goes home and feels sorry for himself because he can't get what he really, really wants so badly.

Maybe we pause here for a second and talk about self-pity and passivity and bitterness and resentment because sometimes we feel like it's okay to be like that.

Sometimes we feel like it's okay to sit on our beds and be angry at God, be angry at all those other perfect Christians around us in our lives. But the Bible really warns us of that.

[17:32] You see in Genesis, Adam is passive when he should have been proactive in warning Eve not to eat the fruit, right? And the story of David, David doesn't go to war with his people.

He actually just sits passively on his roof seeing something or someone that he really, really wants but can't have. The Israelites in the desert when they leave Egypt, they always sin when they start feeling sorry for themselves.

That's when they make the golden calf. That's when they wish they were back in Egypt in idolatry and slavery and scapegoating and not taking responsibility.

It didn't work for Adam. It didn't work for David and it doesn't work for Ahab. In verse 19, there's a question directed at Ahab.

I don't know if you noticed and it says, have you killed and taken possession? Not your wife, not your guys that you commanded to do it, no you, you are responsible.

[18:41] And of course, King Ahab is guilty of that, right? And the Bible asks us directly the same question today. Is it your fault?

And if we're honest, we have to say yes. We did that. We sinned. It's often when we are passive that the idolatry in our hearts starts to settle.

That's when our desires, as James put it, our desires become pregnant with sin and once they start giving birth to sin, it's already too late.

Okay. We've talked a good bit about Ahab and Jezebel and idolatry. So let's talk a bit about Naboth and the vineyard.

And in order to do that, I need you to take a minute and imagine something for me. Imagine that you are living in the highlands. Some of you have lived in the highlands for maybe all your life and you just moved to Edinburgh or maybe some years in your life, so it shouldn't be too difficult.

[19:43] Okay. Imagine you're in the highlands. You have a bit of land and you enjoy your life there. And I forgot to mention you live right next to Balmoral Castle, right?

Now one day you get a phone call from King Charles and he says, listen, I know that you own the land right next to my lands around Balmoral Castle and I'm quite interested in buying some of your land for a project that I've planned for a while.

Now I'm not sure what kind of project King Charles would plan, but he's got something in mind. Okay. I'm sure. Money is no problem. He says, in fact, if you like to choose some other property, just go ahead.

I'll make sure it happens, right? No problem. And their right minds would say no to this. Right? So win-win situation.

You have a good standing with the king. He knows you're the guy who gave him that land for his cheese factory. I don't know. I have no idea.

[20 : 41] You get money through the deal. You also really wouldn't want the king to have anything against you. Safe is safe. Okay. So this is a hypothetical situation and very unlikely for anyone here to happen probably.

But for Naboth, that is pretty much what did happen. The chapter starts out by introducing us to Naboth. Some guy from Jezreel and if you haven't noticed, Jezreel is not Samaria where King Aeb usually is.

So Aeb has some house in Jezreel where he goes for holidays, I imagine. Something like that. And Naboth has that vineyard right next to it.

So Aeb thinks, perfect. I want that land so I can make a vegetable garden out of it. But there is a problem. Naboth can't sell. Why?

In Leviticus 25, we're again back to the law. There are a lot of rules written down about the land of Israel, the land that was inherited to you. And one of those rules says that under no circumstances can you sell that land unless you are super poor, you have nothing left to give.

[21 : 56] And that's the only option where you can say, okay, I sell that land to get some money to survive, basically. But even then, after seven years in the Sabbath year, the land would go back to the original owner.

Okay. So Naboth says, sorry, can't do. I have to decline that offer. And let's be honest, it would have been a good deal for Naboth. King Aeb would have paid him good money or given him a different, even a better vineyard than the one he had.

But Naboth stays strong and he says, no, can't sell. And Aeb goes home, waxed in sullen, being angry at God and his laws and at Naboth for following those laws.

Okay, I want you to think for a second. Why is it that Naboth can sell? I mean, I just said it, but if we are honest, there's only one thing.

There's one thing that doesn't allow Naboth to sell. And the answer is this, God's holy word, God's commands. You might wonder, what's your point?

[23 : 07] Well, the point is this. The majority of people in our society, in our culture, here in Edinburgh, if you would go on Princess Street and you would say, if no one gets hurt and if both parties consent to the deal, there's nothing sinful about it.

I think 90, more than 90% of the people would agree with this. If everyone consents, if no one gets hurt, we're all good.

Everything's allowed. Everything goes. But this man Naboth is saying something different, isn't he? He says, the Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.

The only thing is that the Lord forbid. God's word. Often sin can seem like it doesn't hurt anyone.

Often we think, what does it matter if I do that right now?

Often we don't even see a problem with the idolatry of our hearts. When we sell out like this, it's too late. But Naboth didn't sell out. It would have been a good deal for Naboth.

[24 : 14] Nobody would have been hurt. Nobody would have known. But Naboth chooses to follow God's commands. And I think we can learn a lot from him.

It requires so much strength to be faithful to God's word in what seems to be a godless world.

See when you sometimes can't see why God requires some of those things from you. Does he not want me to be happy? Does God not want me to live life to the fullest?

Yes, he does. God does want you to live life to the fullest. But God also knows what it is we really need.

And God requires that we trust that and we place our faith in His promises. Even when we think we know better. Especially when we think we know better.

[25 : 10] Especially when we really want something. And Naboth understands that. And he did not sell out. If you're a little bit like me, which maybe you aren't, but maybe you are, then you will say right now, well, that's great for Naboth, okay?

Great that he didn't sell out, but didn't he get killed for that in the end? And also, I don't think I'm as strong as Naboth. I've tried again and again and again, and I just mess it up every single time I'm selling out.

I can't be as good as Naboth. Well, I'm not here to tell you to just try harder, okay? That's not what we're doing here.

That person Naboth in this story is not just an example of how to live. He is that. But actually, he's a picture for someone else as well. We get a picture here in this story that reminds us of someone who's righteous, right?

A true owner of a vineyard. The true owner of God's people. A righteous one who lived according to God's law and fulfilled every single iota of it.

[26 : 18] One who gets accused of blasphemy. One who's given a false trial with false witnesses. One who gets dragged out of the city and who is killed for the idolatry of his own people.

The picture of Naboth should remind us of Jesus Christ, of our Lord and Savior, of the one who never sold out, of the one who was righteous, of the one who had a false trial, false witnesses who got dragged out of the city and who got killed.

By his blood, we are forgiven, even if we sell out, even if we mess up. Forgiveness is something that requires repentance.

Our story doesn't end here, right? The story doesn't end with the death of Naboth. Actually, we hear from our main character Elijah again.

God commands Elijah to prophesy a very difficult message to Ahab and Jezebel. It's not a nice prophecy. It predicts their coming death for all the sins they have committed and all the idolatry they have committed.

[27 : 38] After all the signs that God had given them, after all the miracles and all the victories God had given them. And King Ahab actually reacts in a way that we wouldn't have expected, right?

King Ahab goes and he humbles himself before God and God rewards that and delays his punishment. But the problem is King Ahab humbles himself, but he doesn't repent.

If you read the next chapter, you will see that King Ahab consults 400 false prophets and he goes and he does things again that are not what God commands him to do.

So he's continuing that idolatry. He's continuing to follow his own heart. It seems as though Ahab is repenting in that moment, but that is not what's happening.

But the text is trying to show us that it would have been the right response. Repentance. True repentance would have been the right response to all the sin and idolatry that has been going on there.

[28 : 44] Repentance actually is the antidote to sin and idolatry. If you went to the prayer meeting on Wednesday night, you heard Corey talking about repentance.

But what we see Ahab doing here is sadly not real repentance. He shows by ripping apart his clothes that he is sorry, but what is he actually sorry for?

Is he sorry that he was found out for his sin? He's probably sorry that a neighbor, an innocent man, died. There wasn't his idea to do that after all.

But is he actually sorry that he offended the holy and living God? See, I'm not sure because someone who would be sorry for that wouldn't go and consult 400 false prophets afterwards. Sometimes I think this is like, I don't know if you know Tolkien's Lord of the Rings. Corey's not the only person who can make references to that.

[29 : 45] It's like Gollum and his relationship to the ring. He hates it, but he loves it. And he hates that he loves it. But in the end, it causes him to die.

True repentance is what all of us need. And there's an early church father called Chrysostom. I think that's how you pronounce his name.

Who writes this about repentance and sin? He writes, be ashamed when you sin, but don't be ashamed when you repent. Sin is the wound, repentance is the medicine.

Sin is followed by shame, repentance is followed by boldness. Satan, the enemy, has overturned this order and he's given boldness to sin and shame to repentance the wrong way around.

Ahab was bold in his sin, Jezebel was bold in her sin. Ahab was ashamed in his repentance and Jezebel didn't repent from what we know.

[30 : 52] Listen, if you're here today and you're aware that the desires of your heart are twisted, then do not wait any longer. Then run to God, ask him for forgiveness, ask him for a new heart.

And because that's why Jesus came. That's why he died. That's why he rose again. Humble yourself before him, admit your wrongdoings. Martin Luther said it so fittingly. He says, when our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said repent, he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance. Our whole lives from day to day, every day needs to be one of repentance. Are you sorry for the things you have done? Are you sorry for how you have offended God and others? Not just sorry that someone found out about your sin. Not just sorry to the person that you have offended, perhaps. But are you actually sorry that you offended the holy and living God?

[31 : 56] This is what this passage tonight here asks of you, to lead a life of true repentance, to live in and through the forgiveness that the Father has given you in Jesus Christ, the righteous one who died for you.

Neighbors didn't sell out because the inheritance of that vineyard wasn't for him to give away. But in Jesus we have an older brother, an older brother who died to protect and to share his inheritance with us, his people.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for tonight. We thank you for your word, for your story about Naboth and how he did in compromise.

Father we thank you for the example in your word of what sin is and what it does and how our hearts and the desires of our hearts are twisted.

Father we ask you tonight to give us a new heart, to forgive us all of our sins, not for our sakes but for the sake of your Son, the righteous one who died for us, Jesus.

[33 : 05] In his name you pray. Amen.