

## “NABOTH, ELIJAH’S REBUKE, AHAB’S REPENTANCE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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**Text for the Sermon: I Kings 29:1-29**

### **Introduction.**

Back in November we left Elijah under a broom tree in the wilderness after he fled from Jezebel after his confrontation with King Ahab on Mt. Carmel. Elijah might think his ministry is done, but God is not done with him and another confrontation with Ahab awaits him.

But first we need to set the stage to understand the context.

King Ahab and Queen Jezebel had a lovely second residence, a summer palace up north in Jezreel with great views overlooking the Jezreel valley. Next door to them was a lovely vineyard owned by a lowly Israelite, Naboth.

The more Ahab looked at it and thought about it, the more he coveted it. So he went to Naboth and made a very fair and reasonable offer. Either cash for the fair market value of the land or a trade for an even better vineyard.

Even though this was the King of Israel asking, Naboth refused the generous offer.

**I Kings 21:3** “The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.”

Well, as a matter of fact, the Lord did forbid such a thing.

**Numbers 36:7-9** The inheritance of the people of Israel shall not be transferred from one tribe to another, for *every one of the people of Israel shall hold on to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers.*

Naboth faced a serious choice, a choice not unlike choices we all face.

Seeking the approval of man or the approval of God. Pleasing the king or displeasing the King of kings. Naboth fears God. Naboth is a man of faith, a man of God. God figures into his decision. He refused to be tempted to defy God and God’s law.

God forbid he should act contrary to God and His will and His Word. He shows us how to include God in our business dealings. He shows us how to serve God rather than money.

Godly wisdom often seems to put us at a disadvantage in the world. We may lose a job or lose a contract or lose a friend or lose a competitive advantage because of following God’s wisdom, it may cost you, but in the end God is glorified and He is pleased and blesses us.

Who in Scripture face similar temptations to compromise but stood firm?

Joseph with Potiphar's wife

Job with his wife

John the Baptist, Peter and John, Stephen before the Pharisees and Sanhedrin.

**I Kings 21:4** 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 turned away his face and would eat no food.

This is spoiled child throwing a tantrum. He is sulking. What a pathetic picture, the richest man in the country, crying because he can't have more. How often isn't it true, the more we have, the less content we are with what we have?

Is there something you really want and it is just out of your reach, and you are making yourself miserable over it? He can't have what he wants, and he refuses to get over it.

Enter Queen Jezebel. She sees her husband's sulking. She cares nothing about God or God's law and she immediately sees the solution. After all aren't you the King of Israel, I will get the vineyard for you.

She wrote an Executive Order on Ahab's letterhead to the elders of the town, telling them to find two worthless men to bring false charges against Naboth, of blasphemy against God and against the king, and then do what the law required in such a case. Take Naboth outside of town and stone him to death.

Forgery, deception, religious hypocrisy, perjury, greed for land, abuse of power, corruption of the courts, violence against the poor, God's name dishonored, innocent blood shed. In a word, this is a gross miscarriage of justice.

What are we to make of this sordid story? It points us to heaven. God is in this story.

**We have a God who intervenes to bring justice to his wronged people, vvs. 17-26.**

***"Then the Word of the Lord came to Elijah ..."***

Just as the prophet Nathan exposed the double sin of King David, adultery and murder, so the prophet Elijah exposes the double sin of King Ahab and Jezebel, murder and taking possession of what wasn't theirs.

The wages of sin is death. Ahab's line is erased, whipped out. The seventy sons of Ahab and then all their descendants are killed by Jehu (2 Kings 10). What they coveted and gained cost them everything, their kingdom, their family, their life. They are remembered as the worst king and queen of all time.

Sin takes away the very thing we most want. What does it profit a man to gain the world and lose his soul. There is a heavy price to pay for sin, in the end you pay with yourself, your life.

“O sinner! When you left the place of wickedness, you fancied that you had done with cost; but no! You sold the purity of your nature, the honor of your manhood, the tenderness of your conscience, the health of your body, and the life of your soul. In a word, you sold yourself, and that self, if you repent not, for eternity” (William Taylor, *Elijah*, p. 180).

### ***Why didn't God spare Naboth?***

Why does God do nothing, why is God so slow to do anything?

Is this not one of the most vexing questions of our faith and one of the greatest tests of our faith? How do we understand the mysteries of how God does things, how God governs His universe? In the great conflict between good and evil, why does evil seem to win so often?

If God is just, why is Naboth dead? Why did the bad guys win?  
If God is so passionate about justice then why is He so late?

Why is baby Moses spared but other Israelite children killed?  
Why does James die in prison, but the angel let's Peter out?

God is God. God is not ignorant or indifferent.

I Kings 21 teaches us that though we may not be immune to injustice, and have questions about God's timing, we have the assurance of His justice and can take comfort in His perfect wisdom and will. Vengeance is mine says the Lord, He will repay.

God is slow to judgment allowing time to repent and turn from evil. The day of judgment is set, it is coming. Today is the day of salvation.

### **God delights to exercise mercy while imposing His justice, vss. 27-29.**

Ahab's response is enough of a surprise, but God's response is an even bigger surprise. Is God going soft?

### ***Is Ahab's response remorse or repentance?***

Surely Ahab's heart is still bad, he is a hardened sinner. Is it the real article, is it genuine? All that glitters is not gold.

He didn't try to justify himself, he didn't blame someone else, he didn't lay hands on Elijah. Ahab does all the external things that look like repentance. He puts on the garb and guise of a penitent person. Sackcloth and ashes, torn clothes, fasting, going about dejected.

It was sincere as far as it went, it just didn't go far enough.

**Joel 2:13** Rend your hearts and not your garments.

Ahab may be lamenting the judgment, more than the sin itself.  
He fears his judgment, but he doesn't hate his sin.

No restitution, he doesn't return the vineyard to Naboth's heirs.  
No rebuke of his wife for her sin. No casting off of idols or turning from Baal.  
No significant change in his life.

But neither does God make light of his show of repentance, it is something. God says to Elijah,  
"notice how he humbles himself."

God is always ready to show mercy on those who repent.  
God had mercy on David after his sin and repentance.  
God had mercy on Peter after he denied Jesus three times.  
God had mercy on Paul after his sin of persecution and being worst of sinners.

God postponed the judgment against Ahab's family, but He didn't cancel it. It will come.  
There is a reprieve, but the dynasty is doomed, Naboth's blood will not go unavenged.

God's grace and mercy is a call to go deeper into repentance, to make it more real and lasting.  
If an insincere partial repentance gains Ahab a temporary reprieve, then imagine what a full  
sincere repentance shall gain. Like the sinner in the temple, we can go down to our house  
justified.

**Isaiah 55:6-7** "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near;  
7 let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts;  
let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him,  
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Lest we be too quick to fault Ahab, let us consider our own ways. How often have we sinned  
and repented before God and then turned around and sinned again?

Who is a God like our God? Who can believe that such a God exists? Sometimes the mercy of  
God can't be explained, only received.

### **Application and conclusion.**

#### ***Disobedience.***

There is no joy in disobedience. There is no joy in getting what we want when what we want is  
contrary to God and His Word. There is no happiness in sin, only misery, anger, sullenness.

Is America an increasingly happy place, a joyful place, a place at peace, a content place, or is it  
a place of increasing striving, discord, disunity, anger, rage, lashing out, acting out of lust and  
greed and selfishness and pride?

Are we getting what we want and finding it dissatisfying, discontenting? The more we ignore or attack or dismiss the Word of God the more miserable we will become.

### ***Coveting.***

Beware of the great spiritual danger of coveting which begets other sins, including bitterness, lying, deception, depression, and even murder.

Examine your heart and repent of every covetous and envious and jealous thought and attitude. Guard your heart from discontentment, from wanting what you don't have.

What are you grasping for, clawing after, desperately climbing to reach?

What does someone else have that you want, maybe more than anything else?

Position, power, reputation, accolades, grades, boyfriend, car, house, wife, kids, job, vacations.

Let go, hand over to God, wait on the Lord. Do what you do with an open hand, not a grasping hand. Hope in God, have faith in God, in Him is joy, peace.

### ***Marriage.***

Teach your children the importance of marriage and the dangers of being unequally yoked. Marriage always moves in a direction, either godly or ungodly.

A godly wife would have lead Ahab in an entirely different direction.

I have a friend whose wife I believe is leading him further into a love of money.

### ***God is just and a God of justice.***

God will avenge all the persecutors of Christ, of His bride the Church, and of His Gospel and the Word of Truth. Jesus is the soon coming Judge. Everything will be made right. It will be full, final, complete and perfect.

**Luke 18:7-8** Will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? 8 I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily.

We are made in the image of a just God. We are called to love justice and do justice.

**Micah 6:8** To do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.

God called on Elijah to go to Ahab. Do you think this was easy for Elijah, to be the bearer of such news, especially to the king who already hated Elijah?

Be willing to be used by God to stand up to injustice, to stand up to someone or stand up for someone. Don't be silent in the face of sin or evil.

But, and this is an important word for balance, be sure your motive is love for the other person. Ahab may have hated Elijah, called him his enemy, but Elijah didn't hate Ahab. He spoke the truth in love.

***Story of a man who read this story and became a Christian because of it.***

‘I never knew such a God existed’ by Christopher Wright, Themelios, Vol 17, No. 2  
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/i-never-knew-such-a-god-existed/>

He grew up in one of the many backward and oppressed groups in India, part of a community that is systematically exploited and treated with contempt, injustice and sometimes violence. The effect on his youth was to fill him with a burning desire to rise above that station in order to be able to turn the tables on those who oppressed him and his community. He threw himself into his education, and went to college committed to revolutionary ideals and Marxism. His goal was to achieve the qualifications needed to gain some kind of power and thus the means to do something in the name of justice and revenge. He was contacted in his early days at college by some Christian students and given a Bible, which he decided to read out of casual interest, though he had no respect at first for Christians at all.

It happened that the first thing he read in the Bible was the story of Naboth, Ahab and Jezebel in 1 Kings 21. He was astonished to find that it was all about greed for land, abuse of power, corruption of the courts, and violence against the poor—things that he himself was all too familiar with. But even more amazing was the fact that God took Naboth’s side and not only accused Ahab and Jezebel of their wrongdoing but also took vengeance upon them. Here was a God of real justice. A God who identified the real villains and who took real action against them. ‘I never knew such a God existed!’ he exclaimed. He read on through the rest of OT history and found his first impression confirmed. This God constantly took the side of the oppressed and took direct action against their enemies. Here was a God he could respect, a God he felt attracted to, even though he didn’t know him yet, because such a God would understand his own thirst for justice.

He then went on, he told me, to read the books of the law, and his amazement grew. ‘God!’ he cried out, even though he didn’t know who he was talking to, ‘You’re so perfect! ... A relevant God indeed!

... This was a serious God who meant what he said and expected people to act accordingly. He was not capricious or arbitrary like the gods of mythology, but a God of absolute purity, a God to be careful with. All this discovery was staggering to him as he read on and on. He found himself praising this God he didn’t know. ‘God, you’re so just, you’re so perfect, you’re so holy!’ he would exclaim, believing this was the kind of God that answered the need of his own angry struggle.

... But what struck me most forcefully was the fact that the things that had so attracted him to the God he read about in the OT are the very things which western Christians so often find themselves repelled by.

... Such things offend our supposedly civilized sensibilities. Perhaps we cannot understand them because we have never known what it is to cry out to heaven from a situation of systematic cruelty and exploitation.