

A Study of the Life of Elijah;

A Man Like Us.

Sermon # 9

“Judgment in Jezreel”

1 Kings 21-22, 2 Kings 9

Three years have past since Elijah’s showdown on Mt. Carmel with the prophets of Baal. During those years Israel has faced and defeated a Syrian invasion. Now in a period of prosperity and peace the people of Israel seem to have forgotten the hard learned lessons and have returned to Baal worship.

Tonight I want to share with four hard lessons that Ahab learned.

First, Ahab Found Out – To Be Careful what You Wish For (1 Kings 21:1-16)

“And it came to pass after these things that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which was in Jezreel, next to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. (2) So Ahab spoke to Naboth, saying, “Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near, next to my house; and for it I will give you a vineyard better than it. Or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its worth in money.”

(3) But Naboth said to Ahab, “The LORD forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you!”

(4) So Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken 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.”

Ahab wanted Naboth’s vineyard. You find story after story in the Bible where individuals got in trouble for wanting what some else has. And its not just a matter of wanting something “like” what they have but it wanting what they have, so they can’t have it anymore because it’s yours. My mother had a old saying for that (and yes she had an old saying for almost everything) but this pretty well sums up the problem the saying was - “I wish I had that and you had a knot on your head.’

The story is told that one day Abraham Lincoln was walking down and the street with his two sons and they both were crying rather loudly. A friend happened along and asked Mr. Lincoln, “Abe what is wrong with the boys.” His reply was, “What’s wrong with the boys? The same thing that is wrong with the world. I have three chestnuts and they both want two.”

On the surface Ahab’s request seemed reasonable. He didn’t conscript the land as other kings of the region might have done. He offered to buy it or swap for some better place. But

Naboth would not sell his vineyard, because God's word forbade it. He refused to sell because (Numbers 36:7) said that if a family had been given a plot of land, it was to be handed down from father to son from generation to generation.

Naboth's refusal was an act of godliness, but we are sadly mistaken if we think righteous living is the key to acceptance and honors in this world.

Ahab behaved like a sullen child he went to bed, turned his face to the wall and refused to eat. It is interesting to note that Ahab is described as being sullen and displeased or angry (v. 4). The king had a history of this kind of behavior. Not only is the Hebrew phrase "sullen and angry" exclusive to Ahab, the word translated 'sullen' and the curious version of the word for "angry" is not used anywhere else or for anyone else.

Jezebel enters the picture in verse five, "But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said to him, "Why is your spirit so sullen that you eat no food?" (6) 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.'" (7) Then Jezebel his wife said to him, "You now exercise authority over Israel! Arise, eat food, and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."

When Jezebel asks what is wrong with him, Ahab tell her part of the truth but not the complete truth. Ahab does not tell Jezebel why Naboth will not sell him his land.

Jezebel tells Ahab to get up and act like a man, and even more than that act like a king! She told him to quit worrying about the matter she would take care of it! Some try to excuse Ahab as not being responsible for Jezebel's actions, but the truth is he "knew" what his wife was capable of. She is the same woman who had killed all the preachers in the country except for a hundred and fifty. Now regard-less of what you think about preachers, that seems a bit excessive!

To obtain the vineyard for Ahab, Jezebel devised an extensive and devious plot. With the king's authority she called a fast (not a feast). Fasts were called in times of national emergency, when God's will and word were to be sought. She ordered a phony trial in which false witnesses would bring testimony against Naboth and condemn him for blaspheming God and the king. Verse eight reveals, "And she wrote letters in Ahab's name, sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters to the elders and the nobles who were dwelling in the city with Naboth. (9) She wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth with high honor among the people; (10) and seat two men, scoundrels, before him to bear witness against him, saying, "You have blasphemed God and the king." Then take him out, and stone him, that he may die."

Jezebel's plot ordered that Naboth should be found guilty and stoned (v.10). Stoning was the legal punishment for blasphemy (Lev 24:15,16). But Naboth had not blasphemed. That was simply a slanderous expediency to cover up the real reason which is to gain his property. It

was not that stealing bothered Jezebel or Ahab, they just did not want the people to think it was stealing. As legal as it may have appeared it was still murder.

What is even more hideous about this plot is that the civil leadership falls right in line with Jezebel's plan and seem to have no scruples about helping to put an innocent man to death. Verse eleven, "So the men of his city, the elders and nobles who were inhabitants of his city, did as Jezebel had sent to them, as it was written in the letters which she had sent to them. (12) They proclaimed a fast, and seated Naboth with high honor among the people. (13) And two men, scoundrels, came in and sat before him; and the scoundrels witnessed against him, against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, "Naboth has blasphemed God and the king!" Then they took him outside the city and stoned him with stones, so that he died. (14) Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, "Naboth has been stoned and is dead." (15) And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, that 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." (16) So it was, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab got up and went down to take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."

Secondly, Ahab Found Out - There Is An End To The Mercy Of God (1 Kings 21:17-26)

The plan worked, Naboth was dead. Jezebel sends word to Ahab, instructing him to come and take possession of "his" vineyard. We find out later in 2 Kings 9:26 that they also killed Naboth's two sons, thus leaving no legal heirs, which meant that the land now reverted to the crown.

Ray Pritchard says what many of us think, "It appears that the king and his wife have gotten away with murder. When you read the story. You say, 'Where is God? Does He not know? Does He not care? Where is God when one of His own is put to death? Where is God when a man of God is killed for doing right? Where is God when the wicked rise to power? Where is God when a man like Ahab and a woman like Jezebel can get away with murder? Where is God when evil is let loose in the world?'"

[Ray Pritchard. "Payday Someday." www.keepbelieving.com/sermons]

The Bible says in Proverbs 15:3, The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Keeping watch on the evil and the good."

It is at this point that God instructs Elijah to intercept the king with a message of judgment. We read in verse seventeen, "Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, (18) "Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who lives in Samaria. There he is, in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone down to take possession of it. (19) You shall speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: "Have you murdered and also taken possession?'" And you shall speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: "In the place where dogs licked the blood of

Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours.”” (20) So Ahab said to Elijah, “Have you found me, O my enemy?”

It surely was an unexpected and unpleasant shock for Ahab to look up and suddenly see and hear Elijah and to know that his sin had been found out. But scripture warns us in (Numbers 32:23) “Be sure your sins will find you out.”

The famous Southern Baptist preacher R.G. Lee, pastor of the Bellevue Baptist Church of Memphis for many years, had a sermon about Ahab and Jezebel called “Payday Someday.” The whole point of that message was, that is coming a day of judgment sooner or later when all the account will be equaled.

Our text says Elijah pronounced judgment on the king beginning in verse twenty, “And he answered, “I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the LORD: (21) ‘Behold, I will bring calamity on you. I will take away your posterity, and will cut off from Ahab every male in Israel, both bond and free. (22) I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, because of the provocation with which you have provoked Me to anger, and made Israel sin.”

Elijah arose and went to the vineyard of Naboth just as the king arrived to gloat over his acquisition. It meant nothing to Elijah that Ahab’s two officers Jehu and Bidkar rode in Ahab’s chariot with him (v. 25).

Elijah begins with an interesting phrase telling Ahab that he had “sold himself to do evil in the sight of the Lord.” This phrase “sold yourself” - conveys the idea of habitual, constant activity – trafficking in wickedness. The phrase can also mean “to marry.” This is especially insightful in the light of Ahab’s marriage to Jezebel. Ahab had married an evil woman and in so doing, he had also married himself to the forces of evil. He ended up embracing evil in every facet of his life and reign.

According to a report in the Wall Street Journal psychologists and marriage counselors say that a marriage can survive most things except, alcoholism/substance abuse, infidelity, and differing religious and cultural attitudes especially after having children. [Wall Street Journal. 11/4/04, “Key to Lasting Marriage-Combat.”]

Elijah pronounced judgment on the Queen beginning in verse twenty-three, “And concerning Jezebel the LORD also spoke, saying, ‘The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.’ (24) The dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Ahab and dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the field.” (25) But there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the LORD, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up. (26) And he behaved very abominably in following idols, according to all that the Amorites had done, whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel.”

Third, Ahab Found Out - Repentance Is More Than Being Sorry (vv. 27-29)

“So it was, when Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning. (28) And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, (29) “See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days. In the days of his son I will bring the calamity on his house.”

I would so, like to be able to tell you that Ahab’s actions constitute true repentance. And although we can not pass final judgment on the matter, there seems to be a variety of opinions as to Ahab’s actions. A few see it as a true turning and repentance. Others believe that Ahab’s turning was remorse and not true repentance. If his repentance was sincere it was also short lived. But because of his actions his judgment was postponed but it not pardoned.

Fourth, Ahab Found Out - A Day Of Judgment Is Coming (1 Ki 22, 2Ki 9)

Days turn into weeks, weeks turn into years. Ahab does not hear from Elijah again. But as R. G. Lee puts it: “What about Ahab? Did payday come for him? Yes. Consider how. Three years went by. Ahab was still king. And I dare say that during those three years Jezebel had reminded him that they were eating herbs out of Naboth’s vineyard. I can hear her says something like this as they sat at the king’s table: “Ahab, help yourself to these herbs. I thought Elijah said the dogs were going to lick your blood. I guess his dogs have lost their noses and lost the trail. But I think that during those three years, Ahab never heard a dog bark that he did not jump.” [R.G. Lee. “Payday Someday.”]

Then one day Ahab goes to battle against Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria. Rejecting the godly counsel of Micaiah the prophet, Ahab went into battle at Ramoth Gilead against a vastly superior Syrian army. He went incognito, wearing the garb of a common soldier, trying to avert the prophet’s prediction that he would not return. Ahab had convinced Jehoshaphat the king of Judea to join him in his war with Syria. Ahab is fearful but conceives an idea to keep himself safe so he tells king Jehoshaphat in 1 Kings 22:30, “... I will disguise myself and go into battle; but you put on your robes.” So the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle.” How he got Jehoshaphat to go along with that is a mystery to me. But what he did not know was the king of Syria had commanded his army to make it their singular purpose to find and kill King Ahab (v. 31). In the confusion of the battle one of the Syrian archers shot an arrow at random. He was not especially aiming at anyone or anything. He saw the army of Israel and he shot an arrow in their direction. Ahab was dressed in the armor of a common soldier. The Bible says (v. 34). “Now a certain man drew a bow at random, and struck the king of Israel between the joints of his armor.” The arrow just “happened” to come down and hit Ahab and it just so happened to hit between the sections of his armor. Ahab began to bleed profusely until the blood covered the floor of the chariot. Ahab died and when they took the chariot to wash off the blood the dogs came to lick up just as Elijah had predicted.

Ahab had died but Jezebel continued to be a power to be reckoned with. Her end does not come for another twenty years. A man named Jehu is now king of Israel. When he was anointed by one of Elijah’s prophets, he was commissioned to wipe out the house of Ahab (2

Kings 9:4-10). Interestingly enough Jehu had actually been present when Elijah confronted Ahab as he had gone to take over Naboth's vineyard.

Jehu was rough and uncouth but he at least knew right from wrong. He had never forgotten what Ahab had done to Naboth and he had not forgotten the prophecy of Elijah about Ahab's judgment.

We read the story of Jezebel final day on earth beginning in 2 Kings 9:30, "Now when Jehu had come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she put paint on her eyes and adorned her head, and looked through a window. (31) Then, as Jehu entered at the gate, she said, "Is it peace, Zimri, murderer of your master?" (32) And he looked up at the window, and said, "Who is on my side? Who?" So two or three eunuchs looked out at him. (33) Then he said, "Throw her down." So they threw her down, and some of her blood splattered on the wall and on the horses; and he trampled her underfoot. (34) And when he had gone in, he ate and drank. Then he said, "Go now, see to this accursed woman, and bury her, for she was a king's daughter." (35) So they went to bury her, but they found no more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands. (36) Therefore they came back and told him. And he said, "This is the word of the LORD, which He spoke by His servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 'On the plot of ground at Jezreel dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel; (37) and the corpse of Jezebel shall be as refuse on the surface of the field, in the plot at Jezreel, so that they shall not say, "Here lies Jezebel."'"