

“The Curse of a Covetous Heart”

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Scriptural Foundation: 1 Kings 21:1-29, ESV

Naboth's Vineyard

¹Now Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel, beside the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. ²And 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 in money.” ³But Naboth said to Ahab, “The LORD forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.” ⁴And 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.

⁵But Jezebel his wife came to him and said to him, “Why is your spirit so vexed that you eat no food?” ⁶And 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 please you, I will give you another vineyard for it.’ And he answered, ‘I will not give you my vineyard.’” ⁷And 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 of Naboth the Jezreelite.”

⁸So she wrote letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal, and she sent the letters to the elders and the leaders who lived with Naboth in his city. ⁹And she wrote in the letters, “Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth at the head of the people. ¹⁰And 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.” ¹¹And the men of his city, the elders and the leaders who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them. As it was written in the letters that she had sent to them, ¹²they proclaimed a fast and set Naboth at the head of the people. ¹³And the two worthless men came in and sat opposite him. And the worthless men brought a charge against Naboth in the presence of the people, saying, “Naboth cursed God and the king.” So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death with stones. ¹⁴Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, “Naboth has been stoned; he is dead.”

¹⁵As 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.” ¹⁶And 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.

The LORD Condemns Ahab

¹⁷Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, ¹⁸“Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who is in Samaria; behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone to take possession. ¹⁹And 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.”’”

²⁰Ahab 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. ²¹Behold, I will bring disaster upon you. I will utterly burn you up, and will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel. ²²And I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the anger to which you have provoked me, and because you have made Israel to sin. ²³And of Jezebel the LORD also said, ‘The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the walls of Jezreel.’ ²⁴Anyone 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 shall eat.”

Ahab's Repentance

²⁵ There was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the LORD like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited. ²⁶ He acted very abominably in going after idols, as the Amorites had done, whom the LORD cast out before the people of Israel.)

²⁷ And when Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his flesh and fasted and lay in sackcloth and went about dejectedly. ²⁸ And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, ²⁹ "Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days; but in his son's days I will bring the disaster upon his house."

The Tenth Commandment reads, in Exodus 20,

¹⁷ "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."

This Commandment is different from the other nine in that it points to a sin which resides solely in the heart. It is a sin of wishing for something we do not have. It is a sin of a selfish attitude. It is a sin of discontentment.

When we think of the more serious sins, we often think of sins which involve our hands; the sin of stealing, the sin of adultery, the sin of murder. These are sins of "actions" which dishonor God and which bring great harm, both physical and emotional, to other people. If we were to make a list of the "Most Soul Destroying Sins", few would place the sin of coveting in that list. Coveting seems so very harmless and innocuous to our own soul and toward others, and yet, here in Exodus 20, as God presents to Moses, to the people, and to us a list of ten sins which grieve Him deeply and which bring great misery to this world, He concludes that list of ten with this sin, the sin of coveting. God is teaching us, this sin of coveting, is a deadly one.

Our initial response seems to be, "What? Seriously, is coveting really as severe as that?" We are a people who love to "window shop", to dream of owning things which we do not presently possess. This wishing seems like harmless fun. We like to think God is only concerned about our actions as long as we do not steal, or kill, or do other harmful things to people in order to obtain the things we desire, and surely God is not that displeased, is He?

We believe as long as we do not steal, murder, or cheat to obtain life's goods, then God is satisfied, but The Tenth Commandment reveals to us God is just as concerned as about this internal attitude which turns us away from contentment in Him and His kind provision to us as He is about the actions which would follow that internal attitude. We grieve God when we corrupt our soul and when we are dissatisfied with what God has provided for us and when we crave more. We sin not only by stealing, but we also fatally sin by coveting what we do not have.

What exactly does it mean to covet? In order to avoid a sin we must know what it is. John Piper defines covetousness this way, "Covetousness is desiring something so much you lose your contentment in God." Being covetous causes us to begin to murmur over our own condition, to grumble, or to envy what our neighbor possesses. Definitions such as these can be helpful, but sometimes the best way to understand a spiritual principle is through story, and that is what God gives us in this study of 1 Kings 21 and for our own instruction.

The last time we met, Elijah was running in despair from the wicked Jezebel. She had threatened to take his life before the sun would go down the next day and Elijah runs and finds a broom tree, under which he despairs of his life and he asks God to kill him, but God ministers to his soul.¹

In 1 Kings 20, the King of Syria, Ben-Hadad, threatens war with King Ahab. Jezebel is not successful in her mission of taking Elijah's life, but then another threat comes against the nation. The King of Syria has an overwhelming force which, from all human estimation, it would have been impossible for Ahab and his army to defeat. The King of Syria knows that so he comes to King Ahab and says, "Give me your gold, your silver, your wives, and your children or else I will make war with you." Ahab says, "Okay, take my gold, my silver, my wives, and my children. It is a deal!" But then, Ben-Hadad says, "I want to come into your city and search your house and your palace and your servant's

¹ 1 Kings 19:1-9

house and take whatever I desire.” That is where Ahab draws the line and he considers death is better than that kind of servitude, and he says, “No way!”²

It looks as though Israel is going to be completely obliterated by this overwhelming enemy until the Lord sends a prophet, and in 1 Kings 20, we read,

¹³ And behold, a prophet came near to Ahab king of Israel and said, “Thus says the LORD, Have you seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will give it into your hand this day, and you shall know that I am the LORD.”

The Lord is still defending His great name among His covenant people. He is still being faithful as Israel’s defender and He is giving evidence for the Nation to repent of their sin of idolatry and turn back to Him as the Lord and God over all creation. Through a miracle of God’s intervention, Israel wins the war. God protects King Ahab’s life and his property in a display of God’s amazing power and grace. Ahab was on the brink of having nearly everything precious to him taken from him, but the Lord averted this disaster. At this hour, of all hours, Ahab should be absolutely overwhelmed at the goodness of the Lord and content in His provision of him, but that is not where we find Ahab’s heart when we enter Chapter 21.

As we study this story we will look at four acts of drama and each will provide at least two life principles. The first act is entitled: A King’s Covetous Heart, as we read,

¹Now Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel, beside the palace of Ahab king of Samaria.

Ahab has a summer palace in Jezreel and he is enjoying a summer vacation. As he is relaxing in his summer palace he notices the property adjacent to his palatial property, and he observes luscious, dark red grapes growing on the vines. He observes the serene beauty of the country landscape of the property his neighbor inhabits. He observes the restful atmosphere of his neighbor’s farm, and he says in his heart, “I want that!” He decides to talk to his neighbor as to what he can do to acquire that piece of property and that vineyard. We read,

² 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 in money.”

Ahab makes a reasonable offer, from a financial transaction point of view, to Naboth for his vineyard. He is offering a fair price for this particular piece of property. Ahab has resources to buy most everything he desires. Remember, he is king, so what is wrong with this picture? What is wrong with a king going to another person to ask if that person would be willing to sell that property to him? From the outset, there is nothing wrong with this picture and there is nothing to condemn. It is not wrong to buy a vineyard at a fair market-value price.

What is wrong is what is on the inside; it is the corruption of Ahab’s heart. Ahab is full of covetousness and his Naboth’s refusal to sell the property is going to reveal his heart. At an hour when Ahab, of all things, should be counting his blessings before the Lord, most contented, instead he is counting Naboth’s blessings. How strange the sin of coveting behaves.

Naboth is not a wealthy man as Ahab is. He does not own very much; he has an inherited vineyard he received as an inheritance from his father. Ahab, instead of enjoying his palace and enjoying the grounds surrounding his palace and his vacation, he is all twisted up inside because he observed something he does not possess which he wants to possess so very much.

Here is this wealthy king comparing himself unfavorably with a common citizen. Covetousness will twist us up inside and it will make us fools. Ahab was blinded by the gracious gifts of God, even after the episode at Ben-Hadad. A covetous life fails to enjoy the goodness of God. A covetous life fails to find satisfaction, stillness, peace, and rest.

Proverbs 27:20 says, “The eyes of a man are never satisfied.” The eyes of a person filled with covetousness, no matter how much they acquire, will always want to acquire more. They are never satisfied. They will never be at peace and

² 1 Kings 20:5-9

they will never say, “Aha, now I can rest! Now I can be content with God’s provision.” They are ever lusting for more and more.

We read in Verse 3,

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

When Naboth says, “The Lord forbid...”, he is not using that as an expression, but he literally means it, “The Lord forbid...” “The Lord does not allow it.” The Lord literally commands Naboth not to sell his vineyard to Ahab, and we know that because that is what the Law of the Lord is clearly stated in Leviticus 25:23, and in Numbers,

²³ “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine.”

The mindset of God about His land is: He gave this land as a stewardship to His people and He allotted certain portions to certain tribes and to certain people within those tribes. It is to be an inheritance to be passed on in perpetuity. It is not to be bought and sold as though “This is my ownership and I can do anything I want with it.” No, they could not sell their land to another tribe or to another person outside their family; it was God’s provision they would hold onto the land as a continual reminder of God’s goodness to all the people. Even if Naboth sorely wanted to sell his vineyard to King Ahab, he could not do so apart from disobeying God.

There are two life principles Naboth teaches us. First, we must obey God rather than our own desires. Our fleshly desires will wage war against the Spirit of God within us. That is our condition if you are a believer in Jesus. As believers, everyday we make a choice of which master we are going to serve, and we have to make this choice before we enter into negotiations with sin and these fleshly desires. The moment we enter into negotiations with our fleshly desires, it is the moment we have lose the war.

Notice Naboth did not say, “Tell me how much money are you willing to pay? Which vineyard are you talking about? Is it the vineyard right by the Mediterranean Sea I have always wanted to have as my own? Is it that one? Are you willing to trade this one for that one?” He was not willing to put his foot in the water and test it to see how badly King Ahab really wanted it. No, he does not negotiate, because the moment a believer begins to negotiate with temptation, discuss it, think it, and consider it, that is the moment we have lost the war and the battle is over.

Naboth says, “I have to obey God rather than my own desires. It does not matter what I want. It matters what God wants and I believe the God who blesses His people who follow Him.” Naboth believed God would give him a better deal than Ahab possibly could. Naboth believed nothing was worth losing God’s blessing in his life. He would rather be poor in this world and rich toward God rather than rich in this world and poor toward God; God is his treasure.

Jesus warns us of the danger of coveting when He says, in Luke 12,

¹⁵ *“Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”*

Jesus then tells the story of a man who was a very successful farmer who was so successful he had no where to store his crops. He wondered what he was going to do,

¹⁸ *“And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.’¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’²⁰ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”*

Ahab is the example of a person who believes his fleshly desires would bring him greater joy than God’s smile and that is why he gave himself over to the pursuit of more of this world’s “stuff”. He truly thought his life consisted of the abundance of his possessions, so he acted on that.

We must ask the question: How about us? We must choose which god we believe will reward us best. The god we choose will define the life we live and the choices we make, as we read in Verse 4,

⁴ 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 turned away his face and would eat no food.

That was all Ahab heard. He did not hear, "The Lord forbid..." All he heard Naboth say was, "I am not going to give it to you." All he heard was Naboth being stubborn and unreasonable. He did not catch the God-centeredness of Naboth's life; he missed that completely.

Ahab goes to his bedroom, lays down upon his bed, he turns his face away, and he refused to eat any food. He is responding as a two-year old denied a chocolate chip cookie, "If I cannot have that then I do not want to live anymore!" His covetous heart is grieving over his inability to acquire what he wants and what he longs to have.

A covetous life is only happy in spurts. It is happy for a brief moment: We covet and we get, but how quickly that happiness fades and we go onto the next thing. Such is a life consumed by this sin. Covetousness promises lasting joy, but it delivers eternal misery. If we give ourselves over the pursuit of our personal wants and wishes, we should expect deep unhappiness to persist and prevail.

Naboth and Ahab are such contrasting men. One is politically powerful and the other is a commoner. One is extravagantly wealthy in this world's riches and the other is modestly sustained. One is ruled by his belly and whatever his belly craves, that is what he is going to feed it. The other is ruled by his faith. One is burning with lust for more and the other is joyfully content in God's provision.

What makes the difference in these two men's lives? Naboth governs his life according to the enduring Word of God, while Ahab governs his life by the ever-changing whims of his emotions. That is the difference. What will we build our life upon? The decision of our foundation will determine the course of our life.

The second life principle is: We must obey God rather than man. Naboth had to choose between pleasing the King of Israel or pleasing the King of Kings. He could not please both, and there are times when God and government collide in conflict with each other.

I am very thankful to live a country where the laws of this land so rarely conflict with the Law of God. I know many believers do not have that privilege. Whenever the law of man conflicts with the Law of God, Scripture lays down a clear word for us: The inferior law must yield to the Superior Law. There may be times ahead of us, friends, when the believer is forced to choose between obeying God or obeying man; compliance with human authority or obedience to our Heavenly Authority.

This conflict may occur in rules set in the workplace, on a college campus, or the laws of the state or country. Wherever the conflict occurs, the believer has to have the decision made for him or for her before the decision is required to be made. That is to say, we must set in our heart, "I will obey God rather than man. That is the course of my life. That is the decision regardless of the consequences and circumstances."

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down to the image of Nebuchadnezzar and they were thrown into the fiery furnace for it.³ Daniel refused to stop praying. He threw open his windows and prayed to God three times a day and he was thrown into a pit of lions for it.⁴ The Apostles John and Peter were told not to preach in the name of Jesus, but they went out and preached and they were thrown into prison for it. Peter replied, when he was challenged by the ruling authority of his day to no longer preach in the name of Jesus, in Acts 4, "We must obey God rather than men. That is the conviction of our life."

I do not know what challenges await us in our nation, but I sorrowfully perceive a greater hostility toward the Gospel of Jesus rather than a greater softness toward it. I wonder whether we will not see greater penalty through both the law

³ Daniel 3:1-23

⁴ Daniel 6:7-23

and society to exact upon those who would be faithful to the Lord. Friends, regardless of the future let us grow strong in faith so we will honor God at all times and that we will be blessed for it.

The second act is the queen's cruel hands, as we read in Verse 5.

⁵ But Jezebel his wife came to him and said to him, "Why is your spirit so vexed that you eat no food?" ⁶ 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 please you, I will give you another vineyard for it.' And he answered, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'"

Again, Ahab completely leaves out Naboth's concern for God-honoring obedience. He is only relating the story as though Naboth is the selfish, prideful, and unreasonable one in the ordeal. This is how sin will affect our perspective and perception in our own life and in the lives of other people around us. In Verse 7 we read Jezebel's counsel,

⁷ 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 of Naboth the Jezreelite."

Her question is an interesting question because, in truth, the answer is, "No, just ask Jezebel!" Jezebel is the one who is in charge and Ahab is her puppet; he is not governing as he is being governed by wicked wife. Nonetheless, she is attempting to pump him up. She did not say, "Let us pray about this together and let us seek the Lord together and find His wisdom. God has an answer for us. We do not need to be sullen and sulking. Let us look to the hope God has set before us." No, the counsel of the unrighteous woman was godless counsel; the godly woman gave godless counsel. Ahab needed to be told to humble himself before the Lord and confess his sin of coveting, but Jezebel offers to solve Ahab's problem by feeding his sin.

That is the counsel of this world: Let us feed the sin and it will take us past the emotions which make us unhappy, sullen, and despairing and then we will finally have life. That is the counsel of the godless world around us. Matthew Henry writes, "Under pretense of comforting her afflicted husband, she feeds his pride and passion, blowing the coals of his corruption."

Psalm 1 tells us,

¹Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers...

If the blessed man does not find his counsel from the wicked, where does he find his counsel? We find that answer in Verse 2,

² ...but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

There is a big difference between the counsel of the godless and the counsel of the Godly. Jezebel's counsel was intended to cheer Ahab's wounds and emotions, but it led to Ahab's demise. For a short time her counsel is going to alleviate Ahab's emotional pain. For a brief time, if you say, "Hey, Ahab, did Jezebel give you good counsel," he will reply, "Yes, she did and I am so happy! I am so glad I followed her counsel because it is wonderful." Such it is with the counsel of the ungodly. For a time it seems to have so much wisdom and helpfulness to it, but her counsel placed Ahab and led him continually down a path toward Hell.

Such is the counsel of those who do not have God's glory as their focus. Jezebel's plan reveals her evil genius,

⁸ So she wrote letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal, and she sent the letters to the elders and the leaders who lived with Naboth in his city. ⁹ And she wrote in the letters, "Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth at the head of the people. ¹⁰ 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." ¹¹ And the men of his

city, the elders and the leaders who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them. As it was written in the letters that she had sent to them,¹² they proclaimed a fast and set Naboth at the head of the people.¹³ And the two worthless men came in and sat opposite him. And the worthless men brought a charge against Naboth in the presence of the people, saying, “Naboth cursed God and the king.” So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death with stones.¹⁴ Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, “Naboth has been stoned; he is dead.”

What a satanic plot unleashed against a Godly man. God allowed Jezebel to be successful in her evil design. Later we will learn, as we study 2 Kings, Naboth’s sons are also killed because the sons had to be gotten out of the way, otherwise they would have inherited the property and had the same problem with Ahab’s offer as well.

What an injustice! What an outrage! Put yourself in Naboth’s position for a moment. We take note of two life principles from this sad event. First, sometimes God seems absent. That is going to be true in this world; sometimes we will wonder if He really is here and does He really exist. Where is He?

God seems to be, what one commentator calls, a “silent spectator of the whole transaction”. Do you ever feel as though God is a silent spectator? God is powerful enough to stop Jezebel and preserve the life of His obedient servant. God loves Naboth and He watches over him day and night, so why did God permit Naboth’s life to be taken in such a miscarriage of justice?

We rest upon what we know and not upon what we do not know. We know God sovereignly works all things together for the good of those who love Him, of those who are walking in obedience, of those who are called according to His purpose, and living their life according to His purpose. That promise is not given to disobedient people. It is only given to those who love Him and who stay the course in obedience.

We also know God designs, sovereignly, all events for his glory and for the exaltation of His righteous name. We know Naboth received the greater reward in his death than he would have in his life. That is where God leads us; God says, “Trust me. Trust me. I will show you my glory, but for now, trust me.”

In this story we see, in living color, the conflict between good and evil and the mystery it brings to people who trust in the Lord. I imagine Naboth, at some point, is wondering, “Where is God? Where are you?” Sometimes God seems absent, but He is always present and He is always in control. God did not promise we would not be persecuted for His sake of righteousness. He promises He will stand with us in our affliction and He will reward us greatly in our faithfulness.

Jesus said, in Matthew 5,

¹⁰ *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

¹¹ *“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

In John 16, Jesus would say,

^{33b} *“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”*

The wicked error in thinking because God does not immediately judge them for their wickedness He will never judge them at all. That is a fatal error and an error of confusing God’s mercy with a careless impotence.

The second life principle is we must be careful of counsel we receive. We read,

¹⁵ 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.”

Her counsel to Ahab was to take the property he craved so badly. In times of emotional distress we are tempted to gather for ourselves counselors who will tell us what our disobedient hearts want to hear. As Ahab was lying on the bed, and Jezebel said, “Arise, take the property,” what do you suppose Ahab’s emotions were like? They were happy! This was great! He loved listening to the counsel of his beloved wife, Jezebel. She was giving him good counsel and he was excited about what she was telling him.

Later we will find Elijah coming to give his counsel and Ahab responds, “Have you found me, oh my enemy?”

The evaluation of counsel is not found in the response of the person. The evaluation of counsel is always found when it does not agree with what God has to say because God’s Word endures. God’s Word is what is lasting. God’s Word is sure and true. If you care for your life, ask God to send you counselors who will tell you what God says is true. Their counsel may hurt you and it may sting, but it will heal you and it will lead you to life. The surgeon’s knife is cutting sharp, but it brings joy in healing.

God says, in Psalm 1,

³ He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.
⁴The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

In Act 3, we study a prophet’s clear voice, and we read,

¹⁶ 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.

By taking possession of the vineyard, Ahab becomes a guilty party in all of Jezebel’s schemes. He no longer can claim innocence. He can no longer point his finger, on Judgment Day, over at his wife. We must be very careful in sharing the unrighteous gains of unrighteous people, because we participate in their sin if we enjoy the fruit of their wickedness.

In Verse 17, we read,

¹⁷ Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, ¹⁸ “Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who is in Samaria; behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone to take possession.”

Elijah had not talked to Ahab for about three years, and God is not asleep during the course of this ugly, evil plan. He is watching from Heaven and He sees everything which takes place. He has stilled His hand of justice for the sake of His greater glory, but He is still, nonetheless, takes the sin He sees and He sends His faithful servant, Elijah, to speak truth into this darkness.

In this first life principle, God sees everything. Up to this point we wonder if God even takes notice because we have not seen mention of the Lord up until Verse 17. Does God even take notice about what is going on and is He aware of this travesty?

Proverbs tells us, in Chapter 15,

³ The eyes of the LORD are in every place,
keeping watch on the evil and the good.

Nothing is concealed from Him; not Ahab’s internal coveting and not Jezebel’s external scheming.

I learned this truth in Sunday school as a little boy. One of my earliest songs I remember singing in Sunday school was,

Oh, be careful little ears, what you hear...
Oh, be careful little eyes, what you see...
Oh, be careful little mouth, what you say...
Oh, be careful little hands, what you do...
Oh, be careful little feet where you go...
Oh, be careful little mind what you think...
Oh, be careful little heart what you love
For the Father up above,
Is looking down in love,
So be careful, little hands,
What you do.

Why do we sometimes think because no other person sees us we are free from the most terrible consequences of our sin?

The second life principle is: God calls us to share an unwelcomed message, as we read,

¹⁹ 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.”’”

That is a tough message. Let us be bold in speaking God’s Word into other’s lives. Often it will be unwelcomed and it will not be appreciated, but when we speak the unpleasant truth about sin and righteousness we, first, honor God and we show a zeal for Him in our hearts. And, also, we love our brother.

What Ahab needed was not another Jezebel with more Jezebel-like counsel. Ahab needed to speak truth of God’s righteousness and holiness because it is truth Ahab would not forever be able to avoid. One day Ahab would stand before the righteous and holy God and give an account, and these are words of grace into Ahab’s life. The truth of God is the only help for those who have given themselves over to sin.

We do not “thump” people rudely with our Bibles, but neither do we set God’s Word aside and let our emotions speak. God compares His Word to a two-edged sword⁵ and the Bible as a weapon which threatens the kingdom of darkness. We can expect the Word of God to find an enemy or an adversary with fleshly desires and worldly lust and empty profession and demonic deception. It is a war which is being wage and the Truth of God is our weapon. God calls us to share an unwelcomed message. Let us be faithful in it.

The last act is God’s crowning judgment. God is the King and He does not let man rule over Him. His sovereign power prevails over sin. We read these, in the story,

²¹ “Behold, I will bring disaster upon you. I will utterly burn you up, and will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel...”²³ And of Jezebel the LORD also said, ‘The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the walls of Jezreel.’”

The first life principle is: God offers mercy to sinners. This is a word of mercy to them, because apart from this truth shaking them to repentance, they would experience the Eternal Judgment of God. It is only God’s Truth which will awaken the soul to their need for a Savior and that is what Elijah has faithfully given.

I wonder what message God has sent to you in your life. God is not obligated to send Ahab a message; He could have judged Ahab right then and there and He would have been right to do so, but He sends a prophet who says, “This is a message for you. It is an offer of mercy.” Have you listened and turned in repentance from sin and turned in faith to Jesus when God has sent you a messenger?

⁵ Revelation 1:16

The last life principle is: Sin never wins. Sin is very powerful in this world, but it is never triumphant. Sin, and those who side with it, will always lose. When we read the rest of the story we discover Ahab and Jezebel receive the justice for their sins which God had prophesied. Ahab is going to die in battle. As his chariot is being washed out, the dogs will come and lick up the blood of Ahab, in 2 Kings.

It is even worse for Jezebel. She is thrown from the top of the city wall and she dies from the long fall. Dogs immediately devour her flesh so the only thing left is her skull, hands, and feet.

There is an end to God's patience and we do not want to be there when God says, "Enough!"

Ahab was consumed by discontent with God's provision; covetousness controlled his soul. Little did he imagine how the unseen sin of coveting would destroy his life and his family.

Coveting is a dangerous sin. It will rob us of our joy. It will lead us into other wicked sins. It will choke our spiritual life. It will destroy our soul. That is why The Apostle Paul writes, in Colossians 3,

⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

If we say, "Yes, I agree with that and I recognize covetousness in my heart. I want to put it to death. How do I do that?" We cannot do it through our own efforts. We need a Savior.

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood,
Sealed my pardon with His blood.
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

Guilty, vile, and helpless, we;
Spotless Lamb of God was He:
Full atonement - can it be?
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!⁶

⁶ "Man of Sorrows! What a Name", Phillip Bliss, 1875