

You Can't Always Get What You Want
1 Kings 21:1-29
October 25, 2020
Rev. Dave Dorst
CenterPoint Church

Read 1 Kings 21:1-19, 22:29-40

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:4b)

Introduction:

The tenth commandment, as you know, is *"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"* (Exodus 20:17). Thou shall not covet - how many times have I broken this commandment? I can remember throughout my life desiring many things that my friends had: bikes, guitars, houses, cars, clothes... coveting is so easy. And those were things that I already had! It's one thing to covet something you don't have, it's another thing to covet something better than what you already have. In high school a couple in our church had given my twin brother and me a car for free. But rather than being grateful, we were total ingrates about it: we were embarrassed by it because it was a large yellow car that we nicknamed the "banana boat." It was not a cool car at all, but it was better than walking. But I had a friend who had a Jeep. And, oh man, did I want that Jeep. I remember thinking about asking God to somehow switch the banana boat with a cool Jeep somehow. And come to think about it, I still find myself coveting nice-looking Jeeps when they drive by. Today's passage is going to deal with coveting.

When we lived in Loudoun County, Virginia, the number of wineries increased from the time we arrived from a small handful to when we left there were well over 40. Most of the wineries were well-run, had comfortable tasting rooms, and must have been profitable since they continued to pop up and attract tourists and customers (not sure if they've all survived covid). I can see how someone would covet owning one of those wineries, with its beautiful fields, vines, and the ability to make a delicious product. There was actually a story two years ago about Firefly Hill Vineyard in Montgomery County, VA where the family, the Dunkenbergers, who owned the vineyard was all set to pick the grapes so they could make the wine. They woke up on the scheduled morning ready to pick only to realize that there were no grapes on the vines. Someone had brought a crew of people and vehicles and picked the place clean. An entire harvest of grapes stolen, a \$50,000 loss in one night!¹ Almost the exact thing happened a month later in southern Germany. I assume it was not the same people, and I don't know if that's a frequent crime, but today's Scripture text is about not just a vineyard's crop being stolen, but a whole vineyard being stolen from its owner.

When the people of Israel hundreds of years before Elijah's day had first asked God for a king, God told Samuel to give them what they want even though it was essentially a rejection of Him as their King. But God said through Samuel that kings would make their lives difficult: they will take your sons for their armies, they will take your daughters to prepare food for themselves; they *"will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards"* (1 Samuel 8:14). Today's passage is a very literal fulfillment of that word of warning. Though not initially, as the first six verses show us that when King Ahab wanted a vineyard, its owner, Naboth refused to sell it to him.

¹ <https://wset.com/news/local/thieves-steal-nearly-entire-grape-harvest-overnight-at-montgomery-co-vineyard>

I. Naboth's Refusal (vv. 1-6)

(Four points: Naboth's Refusal, Jezebel's Scheme, Elijah's Prophecy, Ahab's Repentance)

¹ Now Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel, beside the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. 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." ³ But Naboth said to Ahab, "The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers." 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. 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.'"

One of the least attractive things that adults can do is pout. Isn't there just something pathetic about an adult laying down and jutting their lower lip out and pouting about what they didn't get? We're used to little kids pouting, they have no control over life and have very little perspective so that when they set their hearts on something, it seems like it's the most important thing in the world. But by the time we're adults, we should accept that we're not going to get everything we want in life, and rather than pout, we should either give up on something or get to work making plans for how we will get it another way. Ahab was a pouter, though, and very dramatic about it. He stopped eating and laid down in bed when he couldn't get what he wanted, the vineyard next door to his vacation palace.

Remember in last week's text when God said that He had reserved for Himself 7,000 faithful Israelites who had not bowed the knee to Baal? Naboth is one of those faithful. One thing you have to understand about Naboth's rejection of Ahab's offer is not just that he's stubborn and unwilling to give up this particular piece of property. In case you think he's just playing hardball and trying to get a higher price, it's not really about that. The land in Israel was apportioned out to each of the tribes of the sons of Jacob. And when individual families were given pieces of land within those tribes, the lands were to be passed down through the generations. In fact, Leviticus 25:25 says that *"the land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine."* So Naboth was being very honest and honoring God when he said: *"The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers."*

Now give Ahab a little credit that he wasn't forcing Naboth off the land; he had offered him a different piece of property or money for it. But then Jezebel got involved and all honest dealings and integrity were gone. Now that Jezebel understood Ahab's situation, she knew exactly how to get the land for him. Something tells me that Jezebel never pouted in her life. She knew how to get what she wanted, and the next 10 verses show us

II. Jezebel's Scheme (vv. 7-16)

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." 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.” 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.” 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.

Sometimes those who can't accomplish what they want through negotiations and legitimate means turn to the courts to get what they want. In America, the government can essentially force people to sell their land in what's called eminent domain if it can show a compelling public purpose. In Ireland and New Zealand, it's called compulsory purchase, in France, Italy, and many other countries it's called expropriation.² Whatever name it goes by, you feel the injustice of the whole situation where the little guy gets targeted by the government, the powers that be, and has no recourse to get justice. It's a situation that most likely has played out in every nation in every time period. When a king and his royal family have absolute power, the only thing protecting the commoners, the citizens of the realm, is the rule of law, checks and balances, or the good character and morality of the royal family that they will protect and not abuse. But Ahab and Jezebel have shown their low character and morality. One preacher, R.G. Lee, compared the royal couple to two animals: “Ahab was the vile human toad who squatted upon the throne of his nation, the worst of Israel's kings... and Jezebel was a snake coiled upon the throne of the nation.”³ And now Jezebel the snake struck. She cheated the system and got Ahab the vineyard for free.

Who are these men that bring these false charges against Naboth? They're just identified as “worthless men,” which is certainly true. You would think that Jezebel would want “men of good standing” so that their accusations were accepted more readily; but she probably knew that it would take worthless men to go through with this plot. Who we really have a problem with in this whole scheme are the elders and leaders of the city. They proved that they were just as worthless as the liars who brought the charges. They were either already corrupt or they were so fearful of Jezebel's power that they just did whatever she asked them to do. You're probably familiar with the Edmund Burke quote “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.”⁴ There seemed to be no resistance to Jezebel's illegal scheme, it was accomplished far too easily.

And the whole thing was made to look like it's a religiously righteous trial. There was a fast proclaimed, they followed Deuteronomy's requirement of two witnesses, and Naboth was accused of blasphemy, which the book of Numbers said could be punished with stoning. As if this whole thing was not heinous enough, Jezebel threw a religious veneer over it to make it look respectable. But it actually makes it even more despicable. 2 Kings chapter 9 tells us that Naboth's sons were killed as well, so there was nothing preventing Ahab from taking over the vineyard.

But even as the royal couple seem to have gotten away with everything, they found out that they hadn't. Cue the entrance of their nemesis:

III. Elijah's Prophecy (vv. 17-26)

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. ¹⁹ And you shall say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord, “Have you killed and also taken

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eminent_domain

³ Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Kings* (Nashville: B&H, 2015), p. 164.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 171.

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."'"²⁰ 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."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.²² And 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.²³ And of Jezebel the Lord also said, "The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the walls of Jezreel."'²⁴ 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 shall eat."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.)

Ahab was enjoying his new vineyard, though verse 2 said that he had planned to turn it into a vegetable garden. That's the real crime in this passage, right? That he could have been making a nice Merlot or Chardonnay and he wanted vegetables instead! But seriously, he was happy, feeling like they got away with taking the vineyard from Naboth without having to pay for it. He's gone from just breaking the 10th commandment of coveting to breaking the 6th and 8th commandments – do not murder and do not steal. And then he's allowed his wife to recruit people who violated the 9th commandment – do not bear false witness. But the God who sees everything sent Elijah to spoil Ahab's happiness: "I will bring disaster upon you." Ahab could have feigned innocence and said, "I never tried to steal that vineyard; I made the man a fair offer, he rejected it, I told my wife, yada yada, the townpeople stoned him, and it'd be a shame to let that beautiful vineyard go to waste so I took it over." But Ahab knew as soon as he saw Elijah what was coming because he said, "have you found me, o my enemy?" He knew he was guilty. And Jezebel would get her punishment and it sounds like it would be a lot worse than Ahab's. We'll read about both of their deaths next week.

This should both unsettle us and comfort us. It should unsettle us that our sins are not truly hidden, that nothing escapes God's notice, and that sometimes He brings things into the light that we would prefer stay secret. Who remembers when someone published the member list for the Ashley Madison website for married people who wanted to have affairs? People who thought they were getting away with a lot of sin were exposed to anyone who wanted to look up their names. That is scary and unnerving. But this should also comfort us that God will avenge His people who are wronged, if not in this life, in the life to come. 2 Thessalonians 1:6 – "since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you." You may point out that's not a lot of comfort for Naboth, who is still dead, but God will work out justice on His own timetable. Every wrong will be made right, everything sad will come untrue, as Tolkien put it.

The last three verses bring the first actual surprise in this passage; Ahab being a coveter and a pouter, Jezebel viciously dealing with someone who got in her way, Elijah speaking truth to power, God holding the wicked to account – none of those things surprise us. But here we see something we weren't expecting:

IV. Ahab's Repentance (vv. 27-29)

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."

So what happens after Elijah confronted Ahab and prophesied his death and his descendants being cut off from the throne? Amazingly, Ahab repents! He fasts again, but this time not because he is angry about not getting what he wants but as part of his remorse before the Lord, along with tearing his clothes and laying in sackcloth. And God was please, he said, "Look, Elijah, Ahab humbled himself!" Dale Ralph Davis reminds us that "Ahab is the one who permitted Baal worship, who approved the construction contracts on Baal's altar and temple, and who even participated in that worship. Ahab is the gutless wonder who stood by and allowed his wife to butcher Yahweh's prophets and... to pull down Yahweh's altars. He is the one who seethed with murderous hatred against" Elijah.⁵ He has participated in stealing a vineyard from an innocent subject. And yet God gave him a second chance?!? Offered him a reprieve if he repented? Did Ahab even truly repent? I think the best we can say is that he probably genuinely repented and meant it at the time, but it didn't last. But it was enough for the Lord and he told Elijah that Ahab had humbled himself. So God delayed his judgment on Ahab's house, saying that it would not happen during his lifetime.

Conclusion

There's a real challenge to us in this story: when we live our lives and conduct our business, there will be times when we will come up against obstacles and walls that will keep us from getting what we want. How will we deal with those times? Will we accept the fact that we can't get everything we want and just thank God for what we have been given? Or will we scheme and plot to get things in unethical ways? Because if you go the unethical/immoral route, you may get away with it. Temporarily. Ahab's story reminds us that God in heaven sees everything! But Ahab's story is also a great reminder that no matter what we've done in life, no matter how wicked our life's deeds have been, God will still extend mercy to us when we turn to Him in repentance.

Hundreds of years after this historical account, another man was falsely accused of blasphemy and speaking against the king, and had witnesses testify against Him in court that He was guilty. And He was sentenced to death. But the stakes weren't anything to do with land, though it happened geographically not far from where Naboth's sham trial was conducted. This trial happened in Jerusalem, a bit south of Jezreel and the nation of Israel:

Matt. 26:59-66: "Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward and said, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.'" And the high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your judgment?" They answered, 'He deserves death.'"

Jesus went to the cross on false charges, framed by the religious leaders who hated His message. And the nation of Israel paid the price for rejecting the Son of God – Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70 as God's punishment on the nation, just as he brought punishment for the royal couple for falsely having Naboth put to death. But there was a deeper meaning in Christ's death. God had planned all along to use Jesus' death as a way of saving His people. But Jesus had committed no sin, He could die in the place of sinners and take their punishment on Himself. 1 Peter 2:22, 24 sums up that Jesus "*committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth... He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.*"

⁵ Dale Ralph Davis, *The Wisdom and the Folly* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2003), p. 255.

Just like Ahab and Jezebel, we sin, we hurt people, we take advantage of them, and we treat them terribly so that we will profit. We offend a holy God with our thoughts, our words, and our actions. But when we come to the great King and Judge and humble ourselves, He extends His forgiveness to us. When we accept Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf as the key to our salvation, the Lord brings us in to His family and into His eternal kingdom. And no one can steal that away from us, we have an *"inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade – kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power"* (1 Peter 1:4-5) and *"Moth and rust cannot destroy it, and thieves cannot break in to steal it"* (Matthew 6:19-20).

AMEN!

Benediction

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

"Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word."