

## Signed, Sealed, Delivered

I want to share a simple message with you this morning. This isn't much of a sermon, but I think it is a word from the Lord for someone. I believe it to be a word of caution, a word of warning to someone that needs to hear this message.

Turn with me to **1 Kings 21**. This is a story about a wicked King and Queen of Israel, one that you have heard of – Ahab and Jezebel. I want to just read this story and then make some observations. (Read the story from 1-16).

Ahab was the king of Israel. We first hear about him in 1 Kings 16:29-33 and it is not a ringing endorsement. Ahab built a temple and shrine to Baal. He allowed his wicked wife to order the execution of the prophets of God, including a threat to have Elijah the prophet killed. The bible says Ahab “did more to provoke the Lord...to anger than...all the kings of Israel before him.”

Ahab was the seventh king of Israel (the northern kingdom) and his wife, Jezebel, was the daughter of the ruler of the Sidonians or Phoenicia, what is actually now Lebanon. The bible says they had a palace near Jezreel. Apparently this was a winter retreat or summer palace built in addition to their main palace which was in Samaria. The Bible Background Commentary tells us that “the palace at Jezreel was excavated in the early 1990s. The rectangular enclosure covers about eleven acres and is surrounded by a casemate wall with towers at the corners. It featured a six-chambered gate, a moat and earthen ramparts. The moat was cut from rock and averaged thirty feet wide and at points was nearly twenty feet deep.” What I'm trying to tell you is that this was a pretty big palace. This was not a small place.

Ahab decided he wanted to have a vegetable garden of all things. The King of Israel and he decides he wants his own vegetable garden. He could have hired people all over the Jezreel valley to raise vegetables for him. **Look at this picture we found of the valley in modern times.** It includes some of the richest agricultural land in Israel, but instead, like a spoiled child that doesn't want anyone else to have any toys, he wanted the land that already belonged to a man named Naboth. Naboth had a vineyard on his land. It wasn't necessarily the biggest or the best vineyard but Ahab wanted it. Ahab offered to buy it and notice in verse 2 he offered to exchange Naboth's vineyard for an even better vineyard. He indicates he wants this particular vineyard

because it is so close to the palace. The truth is, it was about power – it was about a spoiled, dictatorial king who only wanted to please himself with no regard for anyone else.

He offered Naboth a better vineyard or was willing to pay whatever Naboth thought the vineyard was worth. That certainly seemed fair didn't it? The problem was, Naboth didn't want to sell. With Naboth, it was more than just a business deal. It wasn't that the money offered was inadequate – he could name his price. I'm sure it was more than enough. It wasn't that he had a sentimental attachment to the land although he may have had. It was more than that. It went deeper than that. It was about obedience to God and his word. Naboth understood that God had given this land to the individual clans and families of the twelve tribes of Israel. It was not to be sold because it was an inheritance - not just from his father but from the Lord. This land, this vineyard was a part of the promise of God fulfilled to Naboth and his fathers before him and he wouldn't sell it for any price.

Notice what Naboth said in rejecting Ahab's offer: "The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers." And then notice what Ahab did and said. He went home, "sullen and angry" the bible says, went into his room and "lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat." (What is he...five years old? Talk about childish behavior). Jezebel his wife came in and wanted to know what was wrong. Notice what Ahab told her. He misrepresented what Naboth said. Ahab told Jezebel that Naboth said, "I will not give you my vineyard." Ahab left out the important part – that Naboth recognized that land as an inheritance from the Lord. He left out the fact that Numbers 27:8-11 made provision for the land to be passed to the nearest relative, but it wasn't to be sold – it was the promised land - the inheritance given to the people of God. It wasn't his to trade or sell but that didn't matter to Ahab or Jezebel.

Verse 7 records Jezebel's response to Ahab's weakness. "Is this how you act as king over Israel?" Jezebel was the daughter of the king of Phoenicia (now Lebanon) and was accustomed to the actions of a dictator who could and would take whatever he wanted. That was the way her father would act but it was not the way God had established for Israel's king. The king did not have the right to simply take someone's land, but this wouldn't stop Jezebel. She told Ahab she would get Naboth's vineyard for

him and for him to get up, eat, cheer up, she would get the vineyard for him.

In the ancient East the property of public criminals reverted to the crown so Jezebel conspired to turn Naboth into a criminal. She wrote letters in Ahab's name to the elders of the city of Jezreel. She told them to proclaim a day of fasting, probably suggesting that there was a crisis in the city and they needed to fast and pray for God to reveal the source of the problem. Then they were to have two scoundrels lie and claim that Naboth was the problem, that he had cursed God and the king and then they were to condemn him for treason and blasphemy and stone him to death. Jezebel placed Ahab's royal seal on the letters (undoubtedly with his knowledge and approval) and sent them off to the elders and nobles who the bible said, "did as Jezebel directed in the letters she had written to them." They sent back word to Jezebel "Naboth has been stoned and is dead."

When she received word that her orders had been carried out, she told Ahab to stop his pouting. Naboth is dead so go get your vineyard! Let's read the rest of the story now from v16-26.

Ahab hurries to Naboth's vineyard next door, eager to take possession of his latest toy. He seems to have not even the slightest tinge of guilt or regret over what has happened. Expecting to enjoy his new vineyard, imagine his surprise when Elijah walks in and confronts him, calling him a murderer and prophesying judgment upon him for his actions.

Surprisingly, Ahab repents and humbles himself before God (v27-29). Because he repented and humbled himself, God tempered his judgment somewhat.

Nevertheless, Ahab's legacy was one of evil and wickedness. Notice verse 25 –

**“There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife.”** What a tragic legacy. With that said, let me make three observations about this story we've read today.

1. **The world will never understand the actions of the godly.** The unfortunate hero of this story is Naboth. Here is this little guy, an underdog, just minding his own business, tending his vineyard, taking care of the land he inherited, the land God gave him, when suddenly he becomes the object of the king and the queen's wrath. They want him dead and actually the reason is because he refused to compromise and

insisted on doing the right thing. He refuses to sell because he wasn't supposed to give up the land of his inheritance. He wouldn't sell because he didn't want to displease the Lord or by his actions despise the inheritance God had given to the children of Israel. He was doing the right thing, the godly thing and Ahab just couldn't understand that.

He offers him money, a better piece of land, a better and bigger vineyard, more money, and Ahab can't imagine why Naboth wouldn't accept his offer. He couldn't understand: it's not about money or might, it's about obedience to God. It's not about more property, it's about principle. It's about doing the right thing, even if it means sacrifice, even if it means passing up the opportunity to own a bigger and better vineyard. Naboth was determined to obey God and do what was right and Ahab and the world could never understand that decision.

Can I tell you – the world will never understand the choices you make to obey God. The world won't understand why the church takes the stand we do with the unborn, the weak, the infirm, the elderly. The world won't understand why we oppose the destruction of human embryos or why we oppose abortion or why we oppose euthanasia. They won't understand why we place such value upon all human life because we see it as God given and sacred.

The world won't understand why you refuse to compromise, why you won't cheat on your spouse, why you won't throw away your family, your values, your commitments, in order to advance your career or simply to please yourself. The world won't understand why you give 10% of your income, your tithe, to the Lord. The world won't understand why a young couple like Tim and Liz Sebastian would leave the comforts of America and take their two little boys to India to tell people about Jesus. The world won't understand the sacrifices you make to serve God and serve others. The world can't understand the actions of a godly person who will take a stand and obey God so don't expect them to. Don't expect them to understand or to commend you for your effort or to support you. They will laugh, mock, call you crazy, naive, stupid. They will oppose you if they can, so determine in your heart you are going to obey God and do what is right regardless of the cost or the sacrifice involved. There are more important things in this life than money or possessions or bigger and better vineyards. Naboth is the only one who triumphed in this story. He won, even though it cost him his life.

**2. If you can be bought, the devil will meet your price.** You've heard me say this many times over the years, but it is still the truth and you need to be aware of it everyday of your life. If you can be bought, the devil will absolutely meet your price.

When Elijah found Ahab in the vineyard, Ahab said, "So you have found me, my enemy!" And Elijah in essence said, "I haven't come looking for you because you are my enemy. You aren't my enemy, I'm here because you've made yourself an enemy of God by selling yourself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord." We quoted verse 25 earlier and it was that verse that the Lord used to grab my attention and begin to deal with my heart. "There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord." He sold himself to do evil. May I say it one more time: If you can be bought, if there is a sale price in your life, in your soul, the devil will meet your price.

Ahab sold himself, he sold his soul, his future, his family, his relationship with God, he sold everything...for what? Grapes? A vineyard? He sold himself to evil. One commentary said Ahab "sacrificed his principles to obtain what he wanted which included a comparatively worthless vineyard." He sold himself out to the devil for a handful of grapes! What is your price? Can you be bought?

Jezebel sold herself for power, control, influence, wealth, position. She needed Ahab to be the king but it appears she was the power behind the throne. She wanted the power, the prestige and all that goes with it so she sold herself to do evil. What is your price? Will you sell yourself to do evil in exchange for power? Position? For prominence and influence? What is your price?

Middle school and high school is such a difficult time because everyone is trying to fit in. Students, will you sell yourself to do evil in order to fit in? Would you sacrifice doing what is right and pleasing to God in order to please some other crowd? Is being accepted by teammates or the other cheerleaders or band members or whatever club or crowd you are trying to impress, is it worth disobeying God? Is keeping that boyfriend or girlfriend worth compromising your values and sinning against God? Is being accepted by "the crowd" worth selling yourself to do evil? If you can be bought, the devil will meet your price.

The city elders and nobles of Jezreel – they were in on this conspiracy to kill Naboth as well. They did the dirty work. They sold themselves to do evil in order to

keep their jobs. They killed an innocent man just so Jezebel wouldn't remove them from their positions. You wouldn't kill someone to keep your job, but would you lie, cheat, use deceptive practices to make a sale? Would you sacrifice your principles to keep a job or to keep up an appearance? Would you lie about someone to cover yourself or your boss? What is your price? If you can be bought, the devil will meet your price.

You have to make up your mind and decide "I cannot be bought. I am going to serve God and live my life according to his word. Nothing this world has to offer, nothing the devil has to offer is worth sacrificing my relationship with God. No price the devil can offer me is worth losing my soul and going to hell. Nothing anyone can tempt me with is worth losing my family, my integrity, my reputation, my good name, my self. I will not sell myself to anyone. I will not sell myself to do evil. Instead, I will give myself to God alone." If you can be bought, the devil will meet your price.

**3. The cost of sin and disobedience is always greater than you think.** Ahab must have thought, "So what if I get caught. I'm the king. How bad can it be? So what if God is upset with me. How bad can it be? What could he do?" But it was much worse than he expected. Much worse than he thought.

You see, no one ever thinks they are going to get caught. Everyone thinks they can get by with it. Few consider the consequences and if they do, they think it only affects themselves. "So what if I cheat on my spouse. It's my choice. It only affects me." Don't be silly. Of course it doesn't affect only you! It affects everyone around you, everyone that knows you, everyone that knows your spouse, everyone that knows the person you are cheating with. Hundreds of people are affected by your actions and your choices.

The cost of sin and disobedience is always greater than you think. It is always much more far reaching than you think. Ahab thought it would only affect himself and Naboth but it affected so much more.

Elijah tells him just how far reaching his sin and its consequences would be. **"I am going to bring disaster on you. I will consume your descendants and cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel – slave or free...Dogs will devour Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel...Dogs will eat those belonging to Ahab who die in the city and**

**the birds of the air will feed on those who die in the country.” 1 Kings 21:21-24**

Sin doesn't just affect one person or two, it affects all around. It affects the generations yet to come. Children and grandchildren are affected by your choices today. Think about what you are doing. Think about what you are about to do. The cost is always greater than you think.

Because Ahab repented and humbled himself, the Lord relented somewhat concerning him. The Lord told him that he would not see the disaster that would come upon his family but it would happen during his son's lifetime.

Look at 2 Kings 9:24. Joram was Ahab's son. **“Jehu drew his bow and shot Joram between the shoulders. The arrow pierced his heart and he slumped down in his chariot. Jehu said to Bidkar, his chariot officer, ‘Pick him up and throw him on the field that belonged to Naboth the Jezreelite. Remember how you and I were riding together in chariots behind Ahab his father when the Lord made this prophecy about him: ‘Yesterday I saw the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons, declares the Lord, and I will surely make you pay for it on this plot of ground, declares the Lord.’ Now then, pick him up and throw him on that plot, in accordance with the word of the Lord.” 2 Kings 9:24-26.**

The cost of sin is always higher, always greater, always more far reaching than you think. Ahab paid, but so did his son.

2 Kings 9:30-37 tells of the death of Jezebel where the dogs ate her flesh. 2 Kings 10 tells of seventy sons of the house of Ahab – these were royal princes – and they were all killed, beheaded and their heads placed in baskets and stacked at the gates of the city of Jezreel. Look at 2 Kings 10:10-11. **“Know then that not a word the Lord has spoken against the house of Ahab will fail. The Lord has done what he promised through his servant Elijah. So Jehu killed everyone in Jezreel who remained of the house of Ahab, as well as all his chief men, his close friends and his priests, leaving him no survivor.” 2 Kings 10:10-11.** May I say it one more time: the cost of sin and disobedience is always greater than you think.

All of this pain, all of this death and destruction, Ahab left with no survivors, his family all gone, all over a bunch of grapes? I realize it is not really that simple. There was much more sin and idolatry and wickedness than this one thing. But when it

comes down to it, he sold his soul, he sold himself to do evil, for nothing more than the equivalent of a handful of grapes. What are you selling yourself for? Who are you selling yourself to?

I called this message "Signed, Sealed, Delivered". Are you going to sell yourself to do evil, to sin, to just pleasing yourself, or will you sell yourself to the Lord? Will you sell yourself to please God, to serve him, to live for him? Can we say to the Lord this morning, "I won't sell myself to anyone else but you. Signed, sealed, delivered, I'm yours Lord!"

The choice is yours. Ahab didn't have to make the choices he made. Neither do you. You can stop and make a new choice today. You can choose to give yourself to the Lord. You can choose to stand for what is right, like Naboth. It may cost you plenty here, but Jesus said, "...whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" Matthew 16:25-26

Don't sell yourself to the devil or to evil or to sin. Seal the deal with Jesus today. Surrender to him. Signed, sealed, delivered, I'm yours Jesus. I'm yours today and for eternity.