

Text: 1 Kings 21

Theme: Series-Elijah, a Man like You and Me: A Specific Example of Divine Judgment
Sermon delivered by Reverend Dele Agbelusi during Morning Prayer Service on 02/11/2014 at 10.30am

Elijah had been dealing with Ahab and Jezebel since the beginning of his prophetic ministry. Both his message and his model of life were well known to them. For years they were exposed to the truth, and for years God patiently waited. Still, they refused to believe. The powerful showdown on Mount Carmel, where God proved Himself as the One to follow, instead of softening their hearts, only made them harder. They stubbornly and deliberately refused to repent.

In 1 Kings 20, God had graciously covered the nakedness and prevented a total annihilation of Ahab and his cohorts. God fought for His glory in apostate Israel and upturned the planned humiliation of Ahab and Israel by Ben Hadad, King of Aram. (1 Kings 20: 29-30). He had tamely overlooked the great advantages God had given him by enlarging his dominion for the honour of his kingdom, through his victory over the Syrians, and now is eager to enlarge his garden, only for the convenience of his house, as if to be penny wise would atone for being pound foolish. To desire a convenience to his estate was not evil but not when it deprived a poor owner of his family heritage in direct disobedience to God's instruction.

Canaan was in a peculiar manner God's land; the Israelites were his tenants; and this was one of the conditions of their leases, that they should not alienate (no, not to one another) any part of that which fell to their lot, unless in case of extreme necessity, and then only till the year of jubilee (Lev. 25: 28). Now Naboth foresaw that, if his vineyard were sold to the crown, it would never return to his heirs, no, not in the jubilee. He would gladly oblige the king, but he must obey God rather than men, and therefore in this matter desires to be excused.

Naboth is a simple man who owns a little piece of ground with a vineyard on it. This vineyard, which Naboth inherited from his father, happens to lie in the shadow of King Ahab's majestic palace. One day, for some twisted reason, Ahab notices it and soon becomes bound and determined to own it. Now according to Jewish law, Naboth could not sell his father's inheritance, and he reminds the king of this.

Ahab is not satisfied with this explanation. He has made an offer and it has been legitimately refused. But he is Ahab, king of all Israel. Like a little child, he wants what he wants when he wants it. Perhaps if he had requested for a lease on the land, Naboth could have consented but to buy it outright, No way! Some commentators suggest that Naboth could have looked upon his earthly inheritance as an earnest of his lot in the heavenly Canaan, and therefore would not part with the former, lest it should amount to a forfeiture of the latter. He seems to have been a conscientious man, who would rather risk the king's displeasure rather than offend God, and probably, he was one of the 7000 that had not bowed the knee to Baal, for which, it may be, Ahab owed him a grudge.

Ahab, a well grown man and a king, fell into a tantrum like a child who hasn't gotten his way. "He lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat." 1 Kings 21: 4. And Jezebel his wife said to him, "Is this how you act as king over Israel? Get up and eat. I will get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."

Her husband is under stress and pressure. True, it's of his own making, but nevertheless that's where he is. So Jezebel takes and acts in the flesh. She doesn't step back from the emotion

of the moment and evaluate the situation wisely. She doesn't ask God to work in her husband's heart. That's not the way she operates. She is a godless woman who lives her life in the carnality of self-satisfying desires. Her advice reflects that.

It is worth noting that those who cooperated in this scheme were not simply the two worthless men who lied on the stand, but "the elders and the nobles" who went along with Jezebel's instructions. The whole system was corrupt. Justice and integrity were not to be found in this godless administration. No one sought the truth. They gave the appearance of being concerned about what was right, but in reality; they were all a pack of liars and murderers. "Naboth cursed both God and the king," they said. As a result, in a matter of minutes, Naboth is hauled outside the city walls and stoned to death.

Under pretence of comforting her afflicted husband, she feeds his pride and passion, and blows the coals of his corruptions. Had she aimed only at his land, her false witnesses might have sworn to a false affidavit which the elders of Israel would adjudge as good and Naboth would have been dispossessed of his land. Never were more wicked orders given by any prince than those which Jezebel sent to the magistrates. v. 8-10.

Had she sent her servants to hire some desperate ruffians, to assassinate Naboth, to stab him as he went along the streets in the night, the deed would have been bad enough; but to destroy him by a course of law, to use that power for the murdering of the innocent which ought to be their protection, was such a violent perversion of justice and judgment. Naboth has blasphemed God and the king! Jesus was charged with similar crimes, accused of offending both God and Caesar. Naboth, just like Jesus, was completely innocent of such accusations and was murdered without cause. The stoning of Naboth over a piece of land for a vegetable garden shows the brutal and amoral character of Jezebel and Ahab.

Look at Ahab's response. It's predictable. As is his custom, he leans on Jezebel, and she comes through. He never questions how this has come about. He never asks what happened to Naboth. He simply accepts what he has wanted all along: Naboth's vineyard. Without hesitation, he stakes his claim on this piece of land. But God has come to the end of His patience with this pair. He's put up with years of their godless acts . . . but no longer. As with Sodom and Gomorrah, God says, in effect, "That is enough. You will go no farther."

Some people may argue that God is showing favouritism here because David committed a similar sin in the way he took over the "vineyard", sorry, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, and a faithful soldier in his army. You need to recall the history of Ahab again. God would not have punished him so severely if he had not been guilty of many other sins, especially idolatry; whereas David, except in that one matter of Uriah the Hittite, did that which was right. But, as to Ahab, there was none like him, so ingenious and industrious in sin. He sold himself to work wickedness, that is, he made himself a perfect slave to his lusts, and was as much at their beck and command as ever any servant was at his master's. He was wholly given up to sin.

Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, "Go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who rules in Samaria. He is now in Naboth's . . . Then say to him: "... In the place where dogs licked up Naboth's blood, dogs will lick up your blood – yes, yours!" (1 Kings 21: 17 -19).

What is Ahab's response? "So you have found me, my enemy." (v.20)

What an opening line! There is no doubt in Ahab's mind that enmity exists between him and God's prophet. Elijah doesn't deny this, nor does he beat around the bush; he comes right to the point. "I have found you" he answered, "because you have sold yourself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord..."

The Hebrew word that is translated “sold yourself” also conveys the idea of habitual, constant activity - trafficking in wickedness. Interestingly, it can also mean “to marry.” That’s an insightful wordplay on Elijah’s part, in light of the relationship between Ahab and Jezebel. Ahab had married an evil woman, and in doing so, he had also married himself to the dark realm of evil.

Please read with care the solemn pronouncement of judgment upon Ahab and Jezebel which Elijah fearlessly delivered: “I am going to bring disaster on you. I will consume your descendants...” (vv.21-24).

Here are two sobering reminders for us to consider:

1. There is an end to God’s patience. No one knows it.

God’s wheels grind slowly but exceedingly fine. God’s patience sometimes even frustrates us, particularly when evil persists, and He doesn’t step in and stop it. At times like that, it’s easy to convince ourselves that evil goes perpetually unnoticed. Solomon writes of this: Because the sentence against an evil is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil. (Ecclesiastes 8:11)

You and I do not know at what point God reaches divine limit and says, “That is enough! That’s all! I will tolerate this no longer.” But I know from this passage and others in Scripture, and I know from His dealings with Sodom and Gomorrah, Herod Agrippa, Ahab and Jezebel that God’s patience can and does, finally, run out. Don’t be fooled into thinking that His longsuffering is everlasting suffering.

2. God keeps His word. No one can stop it.

Never forget what you’ve read in this chapter. Ahab and Jezebel were so powerful, so intimidating, so wicked. They thought they were in charge of everything – invincible. But when God stepped in, it was curtains for them. They were helpless to stop His judgment.

If you are a child of God, He will not cast you out of His family. But if you are stubbornly refusing to obey Him, continuing to walk your own way, He will bring severe discipline upon you. He loves you too much to ignore your actions. God can quickly remove you from this earth or take from you the joy of your life. He may even, as He did with the Corinthians, siphon your strength and health so that you become weak and sickly. Some of them, tragically, died due to their carnality. (1 Cor. 11:30)

Ahab vented his wrath against Elijah, fell into a passion at the sight of him and, instead of humbling himself before the prophet as he ought to have done (2 Chron. 36: 12), was ready to fly in his face. Have you found me, O my enemy? V.20. This shows that he hated him. The last time we found them together they parted as very good friends, but now he had relapsed, and was worse than ever. His conscience told him he could not expect Elijah to be his friend.

But, I can never stop to marvel at God’s grace and generosity. Look at verse 27. When Ahab heard these words, he humbled himself before the Lord, and God sent Elijah back to him with words of comfort! It takes only God to be God and treat people like Ahab with such grace. God’s dealing with Ahab teaches us to take notice of that which is good even in those who are not so good as they should be. It also gives a reason why wicked people sometimes prosper long; God rewards their external services with external mercies. And Elijah as a good spokesman for God, went to Ahab with God’s message. That is the crucial thing about the Message of the gospel. It is God’s message and we are not at liberty to manipulate it or change it.