

I Kings 21:1-24; I Peter 4:12-19; Naboth's Stolen Vineyard I. The Righteous Refusal II. The Treacherous Scheme III. The Comprehensive Rebuke

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, does it pay to be a Christian? Although we would never say it that way- many Christians assume that there will be a benefit- a payout in this world. Do we expect things to go better for us- that we would have an easier life- because we are Christians? The Bible tells us that it will go well with us- that we will be blessed in the land of the living. With that in mind, we are sometimes surprised by suffering- we are shocked when it seems like the wicked prosper. That the thief gets away with it! That murderers are never caught! That those who rebel against God get ahead in this life while those who try to obey God and live by His commands are stuck treading water- or worse- are persecuted for their faith and obedience. It is this problem of suffering that is in focus today. Part of the problem is this- we have the wrong concept of blessings- and the wrong timeframe for those blessings to arrive. As we return to our study of I Kings, we find Elijah again in Jezreel. Some time has passed from our reading of last week- Elisha has now followed and served his master Elijah for many days. Ahab is again in Jezreel, his seasonal home, and it is here in the 2nd Royal City that our conflict takes place. We consider this theme: Jesus Christ assures us of His justice as we witness the injustice at Naboth's vineyard.

I. The Righteous Refusal

In our first point, we see the righteous refusal- where Naboth refuses to sell his land at the request of Ahab. Now in Jezreel, Naboth owned land right next to the palace lands. King Ahab wanted more land- evidently, he was not content with 2 palaces- he wanted room to expand his vegetable garden. So, he makes the request in v. 2- give me your land and I will give you a better vineyard or I will just purchase the land outright. But Naboth refuses to even consider this request. Now this might seem odd to our ears- I mean what is the big deal. If you want to sell your house for a good price- and purchase another one- you can surely do that. If you had land to sell- you could do that as well today without any hesitation. But what we have to remember here is that Naboth is being asked to sell his ancestral lands- ground that

had been passed on to him for generations. So this is a family farm, to be sure. But more than that, in Israel the land had been given to the forefathers by way of fulfillment of God's promise. God had promised to Abraham- I will give this land to your descendants. So the land belonged to God- and God was free to give it to whomever He pleased. God was pleased to gift this land to the Israelites some 400 years ago. It was a sign of God's faithfulness- and of His sovereign choice of Israel as His chosen people. Added to this fact, the land was given to the people to be an everlasting possession. As a continual testimony and reminder- you are God's people- He provides for you- and this is His land given as a blessing to you. As an eternal inheritance, the land was not to be sold or to change hands permanently. This was the idea behind the Year of Jubilee- that way land that was sold would be returned to its rightful and ancestral owners. The land was to be gift of provision- by way of this equal distribution of land- all the people of Israel might be provided for every generation. To avoid one family from taking over all the land- and to stop the abuse and destitution of the weak. So more than just being a piece of property, this parcel of land spoke to the identify of God- covenant making, keeping and provider for the poor. And it spoke to the identity of the people- this land belongs to Naboth of Jezreel. He was of the tribes of Israel, and he and his sons have an inheritance in the land. In many ways, this inheritance was also teaching the Israelites about their future possession as well. They were to learn about an eternal inheritance- a possession in the land of rest- the New Heavens and Earth- as they looked at the land, they would be taught about the eternal inheritance that had been promised to them by God. They would see that entrance into the land of rest was a lasting gift provided by a gracious God! But Ahab cares little about all this- he just wants a bigger farm and a better place to plant his beans, garlic and onions. But Naboth says no- I will not sell my ancestral land to you, King Ahab. As Lev. 25 puts it, the land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine- thus saith the LORD! For you are sojourners with me. The land I give you shall be your possession forever. For Naboth- to sell the land would be unthinkable! It would be the reject the gift God had given, to deny His identity, and to fritter away what was priceless! It would be

turning His back on the covenant promises as well as undermining His covenant blessings. It would be similar to a covenant child renouncing their baptism and forsaking the church. Or like Esau who sold his birthright for cup of soup! Naboth would not do that- it was unthinkable! So King Ahab is refused- and he goes home sullen and sulking in v. 4. Like a little child who does not get his way, he pouts and refuses to eat or come out of his room.

II. The Treacherous Scheme

But after this righteous refusal, we find Jezebel come up with her treacherous scheme. Jezebel find her sulking, sullen husband and says- stop acting like that! I will get you what you want! I will give you that vineyard. But was this vineyard Jezebel's to give? If Naboth will not sell- the only solution is to kill him and take what I want. So wicked Queen Jezebel conspires with the city officials in v. 8- who then find a couple worthless men like Eli's sons- willing to do anything for the right price. And they together accuse righteous Naboth of a grave sin. In v. 13 they say- Naboth has cursed God and the King- breaking the 3rd and the 5th commandment. So Naboth is killed at the false witness of these two men- murdered at the hands of city officials and the queen. Let the wise take this lesson to heart- there is a grave danger in wanting more! The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil- the love of possessions leads to the grave! Worldly cares and concerns have choked many a seed. If you are not satisfied with what you have, you will not be satisfied by gaining what you want! Greed is a dangerous monster that is always consuming- give, give the leach says. So they take and take- never being satisfied. Let our hearts be warned, wanting what is greater, bigger and better does not satisfy and will not provide lasting peace, happiness and enjoyment. The idols of the heart will never be satisfied. So after Jezebel's schemes are worked out, Naboth is dead and Ahab gets what he wanted. We also note, that later on in II Kings 9:26 we read that Ahab will be repaid for the sins against Naboth and the blood of his sons. It is likely that the stoning of Naboth included the killing of his sons as well- that is why no one was left to claim the land after Naboth died. His family line had been snuffed out! So this wicked King Ahab takes what he wants by force. Now

this is troubling for us- we know that God is just! Naboth was righteous and innocent- and yet the wicked triumphed over him and seem to get away with it! This is an instructive lesson for us. The righteous do not always seem to prosper in this life, do they? Sometimes it is the righteous that are persecuted while the wicked enjoy times of plenty and ease! Just think of the Masterpiece Bakery in Colorado. Repeatedly targeted and harassed for standing fast in their convictions. This chapter illustrates an important truth that we sometimes forget. We should not be surprised when we are persecuted because of our faith! We should not be shocked when we are put at a disadvantage in society when we take a stance for the truth! Remember the prophet Habakkuk- he questioned God's justice as well- How long, he prayed, until justice is done? When will the wicked be rebuked? Things are not always just in this world. Obeying God- and living in accordance with our convictions- is not going to win the favor of this world and our political leaders. But should we be surprised? As Jesus said in Mt. 10, they hated me, they will hate my followers. Jesus was the perfect, righteous man in every way- and see how they hated and persecuted Him! Or as we read in I Peter 4, if you suffer for doing good you are blessed. If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. For it is time for judgement to begin- and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel. It would have been easier for Naboth to just sell the land- make a good profit- and move to another place. But he stood on the promises of the LORD- the promise of an inheritance was embraced! Again, as I Peter 4 continues- if the righteous are scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and sinner? So we should expect this world to hate those it does not understand or agree with. This calls for patience- as we wait upon the LORD to deliver us from this trial and struggle. But it also means that we can look to the future with confidence- knowing that the judge of the earth will do right- that His enemies will be dealt with.

III. The Comprehensive Rebuke

And that dealing with God's enemies is what we find in our last point. After Ahab so confidently goes to take possession of Naboth's vineyard, he meets an unexpected and unwanted guest in v. 20. At this point,

the Word of the LORD is going to come to Ahab with a comprehensive rebuke. Although it is not always evident in this world, the Judge of the earth will do what is right in the end! As Habakkuk learned- the LORD goes out for the salvation of His people and He crushes the head of the wicked! Our God may be extremely patient, but He will by no means clear the guilty! So there is a curse pronounced on Ahab and his line in v. 21- the LORD will bring disaster on you- evil will come upon you. You will be burned up- removed and swept away. And you will be cut off- your posterity will be removed from behind you- nothing will be left- you will be brought to an end. Your possessions, name, kingdom, reign and children will all be brought to nothing for this great sin that you have done! In other words, Ahab will be burned up like chaff and his plans will come to nothing- and he will be swept away. He will not have a dynasty- his sons will not rule on his throne, and as v. 22 puts it, he will have no surviving heir. His name and family will come to an end. Now this is a very specific and pointed curse for this specific context! When we think of the rebuke of kings, we see clear connections between King Ahab and King David. Both David and Ahab took what was not there's. Both Naboth and Uriah lost not only their possession, but were put to death by their kings. And as David was rebuked by the prophet Nathan, Ahab is going to be rebuked by the prophet Elijah. Ahab and Jezebel had taken Naboth's possessions, ended his line, and brought his name and his life to an end. So Ahab- what you have done to others I will do to you. You have forfeited your life- as 19 says- dogs will lick up your blood; and v. 23- dogs will eat your wife's body. Now this may sound gruesome, but it was a very pointed rebuke and curse upon this royal couple. Dogs were unclean mongrels- and to be eaten by animals in the field is be denied the dignity of being buried in the grave. So the sign of judgement would be on them and their children until they are wiped out. Not only is this promise a warning for the wicked, but it is also a comfort for God's people. As Rom. 12 puts it, vengeance is mine, I the LORD will repay. We need not take matters in our own hands- nor should we doubt the justice of our God! The wicked will be dealt with- God's enemies will be destroyed in His time. The righteous will be vindicated, and the wicked will receive their just dues. We serve a risen, ascended and

glorified king! As the King of Kings, Jesus will do what is right! When He returns on the clouds of glory, the scoundrels, rascals and crooks will be brought before His throne! Those who attacked God's people and slandered His name- who raged against the Son as Psalm 2 puts it- will be shattered and terrified by His wrath! The fact is, we do not always see the justice of God brought to bear in this life. But that is not to say that God is unjust- rather His timing is not our timing! He is waiting for their iniquity to be filled up before His Son returns to set all things right! Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead. Those in His name- covered by His blood- will be rescued and their cause vindicated- their names defended! While the wicked who rebel against the LORD and His anointed will be struck down and cast out- their treachery exposed and their schemes brought to an end- their wicked plans turned back upon their heads! We live in an increasingly rebellious time- our society is throwing all restraint off- becoming more wicked, violent and proud in their sins. But God sees, He knows, and He will deal with the wicked in His time!

To conclude, our God is just- but His justice is not always evident in this life. As our theme states, Jesus Christ assures us of His justice as we witness the injustice at Naboth's vineyard. Concerning Ahab and Jezebel, their time will come in II Kings 9 as Jehu becomes the anointed king. For those wicked rebels living in the world today, if they do not repent and flee the coming wrath- their time will come when Jesus returns on the clouds of glory. Job 3 asks, does God pervert justice? Surely not- Abraham would say! The judge of the earth will do what is right! As Job 21 continues- the wicked spend their days in prosperity, but suddenly they will go down to the grave! His people will be rescued and the wicked will be condemned- all in His good time. So wait on the LORD- trust in His timing- and He will do it! As the saints under the throne cried out in Rev. 6- How long before you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth. These were told to rest a little longer until the number of their brothers was made complete. So don't be surprised when it appears that the wicked prosper- their time will come. So we wait- trusting that the King of Kings will do what is right when He comes to judge the living and the dead.