

I Kings 21:25-29; Ezekiel 33:10-11; 17-20; The Wicked Repent and Live! I. Ahab's Habitual Sin II. Ahab's Surprising Repentance

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, is anyone a lost cause? Are there sinners who are so wicked- so set in their sins- that God cannot break their hearts and humble them to the dust? The fact is, we tend to write people off who are rebellious. We think that surely, they cannot and will never see the error of their sin. As they are hardened in their unbelief, they become set in their ways. But we should not underestimate the power of God to humble the proud and bring down the lofty. Think of King Nebuchadnezzar- walking around his palace in the pride of his heart- he boasted in his accomplishments and then God gave him the mind of an animal and drove him away from fellow man. After his season of humiliation, Nebuchadnezzar looked up to heaven and praised God for His power and works. So today we come to a pivotal moment in King Ahab's life. As we saw briefly last week, we catch a glimpse of David in Ahab. Like David, Ahab sinned greatly as he stole and committed murder. Like David, Ahab was rebuked by a prophet for his sins. Like David, Ahab repents and the Lord sees his penitent heart. So this morning we consider this theme: Jesus Christ breaks the hard hearts of sinners to prove His power in the humbling of Ahab.

I. Ahab's Habitual Sin

In our first point, we start by seeing just what kind of man Ahab was. As v. 25 opens, we find that Ahab was one who sold himself to do evil. He gave himself over- selling himself as a slave- to do what was evil in the sight of the LORD. He gave himself repeatedly into the hand of the Evil One- giving himself over to the doing what was wrong and wicked. He was a worker of iniquity- who set his heart and his life on doing what was wicked. Now this is quite a statement- so much so that as v. 25 says- Ahab was the worst king- ever- to rule in Israel! Now that is saying something- that there were none others who were as evil and wicked as he was. Of all the kings that did evil in the sight of the LORD- Ahab was the worst! Even as we are introduced to Ahab back in 16:30 we find that this man- King Ahab- did evil in the sight of

the LORD more than all who were before him. He was the high-water mark of rebellion- in his false worship, idolatry, and serving false God. Note that this is God's estimation of him. We might often think to ourselves- I wonder what other people think of me? What do they say about me when I am not around? Do they speak evil of me when I am not there? But as important as it is to have a good name in this life- we are dealing with what God thinks of this man! The question at the end of the day is not- what will people say of me when I die? But what will God say of me? It is not- what will my family write on my tombstone- but what will God confess concerning my life! Here the LORD says of Ahab- he sold himself to do evil- he was the worst king! Now no one wants to be labeled as the worst- and there are often multiple factors that go into consideration. For example, who would you say was the best and the worst presidents? Most people would say that Lincoln or Washington were the best- and that Andrew Johnson and James Buchanan were the worst. But others might have different answers. But here God is the authority- He knows the heart of man and He sees every action of his hand- and of all the kings of Israel- Ahab was the worst! We would likely say that David, Solomon or Josiah might be the best kings. But Ahab- he was the worst!

He was a rebel- all the way down to the wicked woman he decided to marry. Not only was he, himself wicked- he was wed to one who incited this wickedness in him. As v. 25 concludes, his wife Jezebel incited- or encouraged- Ahab in his life of sin and rebellion. As we saw last week at Naboth's vineyard, Jezebel was goading Ahab in his sin and pride. The Queen was inciting- or seducing- luring Ahab to do and live wickedly. It is possible for a wicked husband to be won over by a quiet, submissive and godly wife as I Peter 3 says. But as Prov. says, bad company corrupts good morals. But it could also be said- that bad company encourages the wicked to act wickedly! So he had an evil wife that incited him to sin- provoking and luring him down the broad path that leads to death! It would be better not to marry at all than to marry someone who will encourage you to sin! If a single life is better than being married to a contentious woman- how much more than being wed to one who incites to sin!

V. 26 continues- Ahab did abominably. His works and his life were a pollution- a stain on the land- an abomination that God detested. His works were loathsome. He was ethically and religiously profaned. He acted as if he was an Amorite- he ruled like Og and Sihon king of the Amorites. The giants who once dwelled in the land to the East of the Jordan- a people who were unmatched in their wicked, heathen practices and sexual immorality in the cultic worship of Asherah and Baal. A people whom God had wiped off the map and removed from the land at the edge of Joshua's sword. And since the Amorites were so wicked- their iniquity was filled- they were destroyed! What then should happen to Ahab and the Israelites who are now acting like Og and the Amorites?

II. Ahab's Surprising Repentance

So when we read this, we expect Ahab to be destroyed and the Israelites cast out of the land. And knowing how wicked Ahab is, when Elijah rebukes him, we expect Ahab to harden his heart and continue his life of sinful rebellion. Is that you- you troubler- Ahab had said! But what is shocking- what we do not expect- is what we find in v. 27. Ahab repents- he humbles himself. As a sign of his humiliation- as proof of his repentance and sorrow- he tears his cloths, puts on sackcloth, eats no food, and goes about dejectedly. He walks in lowliness- as sorrow is seen in his dress, diet and demeanor. Now we do not know what goes on in his heart. There is a difference between godly and worldly sorrow- one leads to life and the other lead to death! There is sorrow over sin- and there is sorrow over the consequences of that sin. You can be sad because your sin has a bitter consequence without actually being sorry for sin as a rebellion against God. But God knows the heart of man- and the LORD sees Ahab's actions. He sees and says to Elijah- behold how Ahab has humbled himself. This is proof that God can humble the proud- that He can bring low the lofty by His Spirit! No sinner is so far gone that He cannot humble them to the dust. King Manasseh is another example of this principle. Manasseh was the son of righteous King Hezekiah- but the son, Manasseh, was one of the most wicked kings to rule in Judah. But this king Manasseh- like king Ahab- the LORD is able to humble as well in II

Kings 21. After being promised destruction, Manasseh also repented at the end of his life in II Chron. 33- and prayed to God. Now this is an important truth to remember- and in fact this repentance is good news! There is no sinner so wicked, no rebel so far gone, no heart so hard that God cannot break! There is hope for sinners- even really wicked and proud sinners- hope even for the chief of sinners like Paul says in I Tim. 1- sinners who are the worst like me! This also reveals something about the character of God. Not only His power in that He can humble those who are proud and lofty- we also see His mercy and patience! As we read in Ez. 33- I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but I would rather they turn and live! If the wicked turn from their ways- if they repent and do what is right- they will live! Let's read a few verses from Luke 15:1-7. Did you catch that- the angels in heaven rejoice and God is glad to see a sinner repent! Just one sinner who turns from their sins- whose hearts is softened by the Spirit- who responds to the gospel- fills heaven with joy, gladness and rejoicing! Such is the love, compassion and joy of our God! Our God is patient- and in His patience He withholds or postpones judgment to give men time to repent- to flee the coming wrath! And flee the impending wrath is exactly what Ahab does! God postpones His justice- for a time! He is indeed slow to anger and abounding in love! God's kingdom includes repentant rebels- Jesus Christ saves sinners! Sinners of all shapes and sizes! From the thief on the cross- to the Paul the chief sinner- and Timothy who was raised by a godly mother and grandmother- knowing the truth from his childhood. The fact is- we are all sinners who need the Spirit to soften our hearts- we all need to be washed in the blood of the Lamb- we all need to repent from our sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved! But we can also take comfort in the fact that God's grace is irresistible! None can resist the Holy Spirit's power- if you are a chosen child of God- He will bring You into His fold! The blood of Jesus will cleanse you- because He died for His people and He finds His lost sheep! Not one will be lost! So back to our text, we find that Ahab repents in humility- and the LORD sees and relents from this promised judgment and judgement. The sword of justice is delayed for a time- but not canceled! The disaster will come- just not during Ahab's days. This

word of God is fulfilled in the next few chapters. Instead of being consumed right then- Ahab is allowed to live out the short term of his life without seeing the destruction of his line with his own eyes. Ahab will die in battle- his body will be placed in the tomb of his fathers as a sign of respect in 22:40- and Ahab will sleep in the grave without seeing the death of his children and wife. His son will even be king- for a short while until General Jehu takes up the calling of the LORD and fulfills His Word on the house of Ahab. God will keep His word- the promises of the LORD will be fulfilled- His wrath will come upon Ahab's house. Jezebel will be eaten by dogs and Ahab's line will be cut off- but not just yet. For now, justice waits its appointed time and Ahab receives the mercy of the LORD.

To conclude, when God saves someone who was once set on rebellion and sin, He proves both His power and His mercy. God can and has saved the chief of sinners and He has humbled the proud kings of men! None can stand in His way- and none can resist His will! And even if His justice appears to be slow in coming- He will pour out His wrath on all those who refuse to bow the knee! As our theme stated, Jesus Christ breaks the hard hearts of sinners to prove His power in the humbling of Ahab. The LORD takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked- He calls all men to repent and flee the coming wrath! So may sinners hear the summons- may the proud humble their hearts- and may God's people rejoice that Jesus saves sinners! Heaven rejoices when a sinner repents- so may we all here repent of the pride and rebellion in our heart- and may we pray for the repentance of our fellow man!