

Series: King of Kings
Ahab, the Corrupt King

First Kings 21:4-16

Sermon by Lead Pastor Paul Joslin

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, August 10, 2025

A reading from First Kings 21, four through 16: “So Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him, for he had said, ‘I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers,’ and he laid down on his bed, and he turned away his face and would eat no food, but Jezebel, his wife, came to him and said to him, ‘Why is your spirit so sullen that you eat no food?’ 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 pleases you, I will give you another vineyard for it,” and he answered, “I will not give you my vineyard.”’ Then Jezebel, his wife, said to him, ‘You now exercise authority over Israel. Arise, eat food, and let your heart be cheerful. I will give you the vineyard of Naboth, the Jezreelite,’ and so she wrote letters in Ahab’s name, sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters to the elders and to the nobles who were dwelling in the city with Naboth. She wrote the letters saying, ‘Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth with high honor among the people, and seat two men, scoundrels, before him, to bear witness against him saying, “You have blasphemed God and the king.” Then take him out, stone him, that he may die.’ So the men of his city, the elders and nobles who were inhabitants of his city, did as Jezebel had sent to them, as it was written in the letters which she had sent to them. They proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth with high honor among the people, and two men, scoundrels, came in and sat before him, and the scoundrels witnessed against Naboth in the presence of the people saying, ‘Naboth has blasphemed God and the king.’ Then they took him outside the city and stoned him with stones so that he died. Then they sent to Jezebel saying, ‘Naboth has been stoned and is dead,’ and it came to pass when Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, that 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.’ So it was when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab got up and went down to take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite,” the word of the Lord.

Paul: Good morning. Does anyone have any middle names they are super proud of or just excited about? Great. Awesome. So, my middle name, most of you probably do not know this, but it is David, and so my full name is Paul David, after my parents’ two favorite people in the Bible, so when I tell you I became a pastor, I really had no choice, I don’t think. Just from the beginning, they placed that on me. Before we get started today with the message, I want to take a moment and pray for a couple of people in our community who have lost loved ones this week. So, some of you know the Eragon family, Joe and Amelia. Earlier this week they received a call that they lost their thirty-year-old son quite suddenly on Monday evening, and then also this week, Ralph Rimple passed away in a biking accident on Monday, and so those funerals are coming up this week in the church. Joey’s funeral will be on Tuesday, and then Ralph’s will be on Friday, and so we just want to take a moment to pray for those families as they are grieving today and as they have this difficult week ahead of them, so if you would please, bow your heads and pray as we lift them up.

Heavenly Father, God, we come before you now, and we just want to lift up these two families that we know are hurting so deeply, God, Joe and Amelia with the loss of their son, Ralph's whole family, Cheryl and the kids, and God, we know that this coming week will be filled with a lot of grief, a lot of sorrow, and a lot of memories, and God, we just pray over their families as they prepare to remember the loved ones they have lost. God, we pray on their behalf together as a community that you would interact with them with your presence, with your grace, with your compassion, and with your peace. Lord, we know that you are with those who grieve, that you are with those who walk through the valley of the shadow of death, and so Father, we pray over these families, that they would just experience your presence and kindness in a way that they may not even be able to fully understand. We pray through the efforts of our church that we could just come around them and love them well, even as they grieve and even as they walk this road of heartache, and we give them to you in love and tenderness and ask that you would be with them, and it is in Christ's name that we pray, amen. Thank you for taking a moment just to pray for them. I know they appreciate it as they step into the challenges of this week.

All right, so we are continuing our series, in the King of Kings, and all summer long we have been taking time to examine the lives of different kings, and as we have looked at the stories of these different kings, we have asked the question, "What has been ruling in the king's heart?" Because whatever rules in your heart will dictate the direction of your life. That is the premise that we have walked through with this series, and I want to ask you a question this morning as we get started. I want you to think for a moment, has there been a time in your life where you really, really, really, and I mean really wanted something? Maybe it was a house you found on Redfin that you were scrolling at 2:00 a.m. You should have been asleep, and you were like, "Oh, man, that would be amazing if we could live there." Maybe it is some amazing car that you wish that you could have, or some gadget or some sort of item that you just thought, "Man, if I could get this, if we could get this in our life, it would just change everything," so I want you to think for a moment and actually think, and has there been a time, and you could go all the way back to childhood, like the gift that you wanted for Christmas or something that you really looked forward to? All right. Does everybody have something? I am going to give you just a second, and then when it comes to you, I want you to maybe shout it out if you feel comfortable and not too embarrassed, all right? All right. Does anyone have anything?

Nintendo. Super Nintendo. That is a great one. For me it was N-64, which age, a little different age, but that is all right. Yeah, we all get that, Super Nintendo. Amazing. I think it is probably a little better than the N-64 on our list, but we do not need to talk about that. All right, other things, anything anybody wanted. Toyota MR-2. Awesome. Okay, there are a lot of letters after that. I do not even know what that is, but it sounds awesome. All right, great. What else? A red Jeep. I love that. I bet a lot of people resonate with that. There was one over here that someone called out. Better relationship with family. Awesome. Okay, so we have moved a little away from materialism. That is good. She is a better person than the rest of you, so, no, just kidding. No, that is great. All right now, I want you think for a moment, okay? The thing that you want, the thing that you desire, what would you have been willing to do to get that thing if the opportunity presented itself to you? How far would you be willing to go to get the red Jeep or the Nintendo or a better relationship with your family? It is because at the heart of it, that is what's before us in this story today. Ahab wants something.

He has this desire for something he sees, and he wants to take it, and he goes to incredible lengths to get it, and the question that we are going to be asking as we go through this story, and there is actually going to be a test for you at the end of this story, is, “What ruled Ahab’s heart?” What did he want? What was ruling his heart that dictated his decisions in life, that led him to do certain things that he was willing to do to get this vineyard that he wanted? There is going to be a test you are going to have. I am going to give you a moment at the end of service after we walk through the whole story. I am going to ask you to shout out what you think ruled over Ahab’s heart, and I think what we will see is that Ahab is not just like this ridiculous caricature of an evil king, but he is actually something that reveals something deep about our own hearts, and so we are going to dive into the story, and it begins in First Kings chapter 21, and we are going to look at verse one, and walk through the story line by line, verse by verse, and see what we can pull out of it.

So, this is how the story begins: “Sometime later there was an incident involving a vineyard belonging to Naboth the Jezreelite.” The vineyard was in Jezreel, close to the palace of King Ahab of Samaria, and what you need to know is King Ahab was actually the king in Israel, but Samaria at this time was the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, so he is an Israelite, “and Ahab said to Naboth, ‘Let me have your vineyard to use as a vegetable garden, since it is so close to my palace.’” I mean, it just makes sense, doesn’t it? “And in exchange, I will give you a better vineyard, or if you prefer, I will pay you whatever it is worth.” Now, on the face of it, when you look at this proposal, there is nothing really like sinister about it. There is nothing that should give you pause. He’s saying, “I will either give you something of greater value or of equal worth,” which sounds like a fair trade, a fair deal, and so it is surprising when Naboth says “no,” and not just “no,” but he uses really strong language to say that he will never do this deal with the king, so in verse three: “Naboth replied to this offer, and he said, ‘The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my ancestors.’”

Now what is going on here in the story? I mean, is Naboth just trying to drive up the price? Is this a haggling tactic? Is he like, “You know what? It is actually worth more than you think it is. The king wants it. What can I get out of this?” and he is trying to drive the price up? Not at all. What we are told by his answer is that what Naboth understands is something that Ahab seems to have forgotten, and that is this, that in ancient Israel, under the law of Moses, land was actually not owned by any individual person. In fact, there was a place in the law of Moses where God commanded, and He actually said, “I want you to live on the land, understanding that it is not yours. It is mine, and I want you to remember that and live as if you were strangers or exiles. I want you to live on the land as if you were renters, knowing that it is not yours. It is mine,” and so when the people walked into the Promised Land, and they received their inheritance and all of the land, they split it up. Families received their different allotment of land based on size and that sort of thing, and it was intended to be something that represented the promise of God.

This land was not just land, but it was legacy. It was covenantal land that was supposed to indicate “As long as your family is here, it means God is with you,” and there were laws against selling the land permanently, and if you sold it to someone, maybe you got into debt, and you needed some way out, and so you sold your land to try to get out of debt. There was a law that would say after a certain number of years, the year of Jubilee would take place, and everyone’s inheritance would go back to them, and so what Naboth is saying in this moment, essentially to Ahab, the king, is he says, “Ahab, the land is not

mine to sell, and it is not yours to take. It is the Lord's, and we have to remember that," and that is something that you would think the king of Israel, who is supposed to be the representative of God, would understand, something that he would know. That is his role, to protect the law of God, to protect the people of God, but we are presented with this idea that Naboth remembers God's commands, God's word, God's covenantal law, and Ahab has completely forgotten or cast it aside, and so when Naboth says, "no," he is not just saying "no," because he wants to drive a harder bargain or he wants to get more money. He is saying "no," because he is being obedient to Yahweh. He is being righteous and following the law, and that is where the story begins to take a turn, because in verse four it says this: "So Ahab went home sullen and angry, because Naboth the Jezreelite had said, 'I will not give you the inheritance of my ancestors.'" This land has been passed down from generation to generation to generation. I will not sell it to you, "and so then he lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat."

Now in my family, my daughter is at the age we are watching a lot of the old Disney classics. Does anyone remember the old Disney movie Robin Hood? It is like the fox and Little John the bear, and does anyone remember that? Okay, all right. Based on like the age of most of us in our room, I would expect you all to remember that. It is a classic. Do you guys remember the king of the story, King John, who is this cowardly, greedy lion that anytime he doesn't get his way, he just starts sucking his thumb and crying for his mommy? Do you remember that image? That is Ahab at this moment, right? Like he is literally just pouting in his bed because he did not get his happy meal toy. He is so upset and so angry because the thing he wanted, this vineyard, he can't have. It is going out of its way to tell us two different times that he is really just acting like this spoiled little brat who is wanting something that he can't have, and he is sulking and pouting because of it. That is his response, so this is not a king that we are supposed to be rooting for, right? No one roots for King John in Robin Hood. He is the one who is stealing from everyone and pouting when he does not get his way. He is the worst kind of loser imaginable. He has everything, and he pouts when he does not get what he wants, and so he is refusing to eat. He is refusing to get up. He is just lying around pouting because he did not get his way, and then enters his wife Jezebel, and now women, I do not need you to nudge your husband if you have ever seen him act like Ahab.

We do not need any of that going around. We do not need to hear any guilt. We have all probably seen people we love acting this way, and Jezebel sees Ahab acting this way, and she is upset, and so in the following verses that we will put on the screen for you, that summarize the story, she walks in, and she says, "Why are you not eating? Why are you being so lazy? What is wrong with you? Why are you being like such a stick in the mud that is so upset? What is going on? You are the king of Israel," and he basically summarizes his story and says, "Well, I went to Naboth, and I said, 'Can I have your vineyard? I will pay for it. I will give you something better, or I will give you more than it is worth,' and he said "no," and so now I am just upset and sad because I did not get what I wanted," and then Jezebel, she sees her husband, who is just acting this way, and then this is what she says: "Is this how you act as king over Israel? You are the king. You can have whatever you want. You can take whatever you want. You are the one in charge. Who is going to stop you? Why are you just moping around? Get up and eat, and cheer up," and then this is where the ominous music would start. "I will get you that vineyard," and if this were a television show, this is probably where Episode One would end on this cliffhanger of Jezebel about to do whatever she can

to get Ahab the vineyard that he is longing for, and so the story goes on that essentially, this is where Episode Two would begin.

There is a letter that goes out with the king's seal and in the king's handwriting that Jezebel has essentially claimed that she is being the king, and so this letter goes out to Naboth's community, and she says, essentially, "I want you to call together a community fast. I want you guys to gather together," and essentially it is a moment when she is calling them to go to a worship service and fast, and the implication is there is something wrong in the community. There is some sort of hidden sin in the community, and so to root it out, we need to worship God, and we need to fast, but it is all a ruse. It is all a scam. It is just a setup, and so she says, "When you do this, when you call the people together to worship, I want you to take two men, two scoundrels," let's call them, "and I want you to take Naboth, and I want you to put him in the most prominent place in the whole church, and then when everybody is worshipping and trying to figure out what is going on and the fast begins, I want these two men to accuse him of cursing God and cursing the king, and then when he does that, we will get the religious machinery up and running, and everybody will be upset, and they will think, 'This is the problem. We found it,' and they will take him outside, and they will stone him, and he will be killed," and that is her whole plan, and it goes off flawlessly.

The people whom she writes this letter to, the elders and rulers of this little town do not ask any questions. They do not push back at all. They're like, "Yeah, sounds like a plan. We will go through with that," and so they call people, and I want you to imagine for a moment the scene. Let's pretend we are in ancient Israel, and this is in a worship service on a Sunday morning. This is a gathering that's been called because the king of the country has said, "There's some problem in your community that you need to worship and you need to fast to figure out what it is. You need to bring the community to repentance," and so we all gather together, and we start praying together, and we start fasting together, we start worshipping together, and suddenly, can I pick on a few people here? All right, Will, can I use your name? All right, Will stands up, and then, Colton, you are going to stand up, and you are going to be like, "You know what happened? I think we figured out what it is. I think we know. Steve, he cursed Paul. He cursed Pastor Paul, and he cursed God. That is why something bad is going on in our community," and everybody freaks out, and we grab Steve, and we carry him off on our shoulders, and we take him outside, and we do whatever the modern-day version of stoning would be, and I don't even want to get into that, because that sounds awful, right, and so it is this moment that was intended for worship, that was intended for fasting, for turning the people's heart, and they are blaspheming worship and this idea of turning people's hearts back to God and turning it into a space where violence is committed against one of the only righteous people in the whole story, the only one who remembers God's law. The only one who remembers what it means to follow and obey God is the one who is killed in the story. Good job being righteous and following the law. They picked on him.

So, what happens is Naboth is killed, and the plan works, and then word gets back to Jezebel that the plan has gone off and that Naboth has been killed, and so she goes to Ahab, and just with this like chilling casualness just says, "Get up, take the vineyard. The problem is not there anymore. The barrier that was standing between you, the obstacle is gone. The prize is ready for the taking," and Ahab does not ask any questions. He just like goes and enjoys his new garden and just begins walking in his new garden,

no grief, no wrestling with conscience of how he got it, no questioning about what has just happened. He just steps into it, and I want to pause here for a moment, and I want you to think about the story that we have set, and what essentially happens is Ahab is king, he wants something, and he does not get it. Then his wife comes into the picture, Jezebel, and you notice how once Jezebel shows up, really, Ahab begins to take a back seat. I mean, he is really, really passive in the story. Essentially, he spins this whole story, lying on his couch, sucking his thumb, upset because he did not get his way. That is the picture that we are given. There is no action that he takes at all, and as soon as Jezebel shows up, he is just passive. She takes over the action, and she drives the narrative forward, and it is trying to clue us in on something that is happening in this story, and if you pay attention enough, there are actually echoes of what happens in the Garden of Eden in this story.

If you remember in the Garden of Eden, there is Adam, and there is Eve, and a place in the garden, this place of abundance. They are given everything that they could absolutely ever want or ever need, and then the snake confronts them, and it offers this temptation to Eve that she could take this apple, and if she takes it, she will get what she desires. We often tell that story, and we throw Eve under the bus of like, oh, she was so dumb, or she was so susceptible, but the backdrop of the story is that Adam is standing beside her the whole time, being incredibly passive as she is tempted, not standing up, not stepping up, not taking ownership, not entering into the story at all. It is a similar story of a woman stepping up to take something and then giving it to the husband, who remains passive the whole time, and there are echoes of this story here, and in both gardens, the Garden of Eden and the garden of Naboth, the boundary is ignored. Desire takes over, and the man who should protect the gift of God, instead passively receives what has been wrongly taken by his wife, so there should be an echo of that story as we read through and understand that Ahab is completely absent in his own story. Jezebel is the one who takes action, and she commits the crime.

What is interesting, though, is if you are familiar at all with the name of Jezebel, it is an infamous name in scripture, and I do not know what podcasters you listen to, and I do not know what TikTok theologians you follow, but here is my guess. It is that at some point you have come across the term “Jezebel spirit.” Has anyone ever heard the term, “Jezebel spirit,” thrown around before? It is popular in evangelical culture, and usually what it indicates, this term that is thrown around, is some sort of woman who is maybe standing up and causing a problem in the church, and so truthfully, like when there were a lot of things going on with the SBC, the Southern Baptist Convention, and they found out all these pastors had been committing crimes and abusing different people and covering it up, there were certain women and people who stood up to say, “This is not right. Pastors should not be allowed to do this. Churches should not be allowed to sanctify sin and cover it up,” and one of the terms you often heard thrown around during that time and, and that is often thrown around in churches in general, is that those people who are standing up and speaking, those people had Jezebel spirits, meaning that they were divisive. They were deceitful. They were just trying to stir up and cause problems for the people who were trying to do the work of God.

Now, what is fascinating to me about that, is you can see all sorts of places in pop evangelical culture where that term is thrown out, anytime a woman becomes a pastor or begins to teach people say, “You know what? She is just a Jezebel spirit. Women are not supposed to do that. She is not staying in her

place.” Anytime a woman tries to speak up and say, “That is not right,” or honestly sometimes even when men do it, they are a Jezebel spirit, and the problem with that is if you just look at the story of Jezebel, it completely flips the story upside-down on its head, because in the story, Jezebel is in power. She is the one silencing all of the people who are trying to speak up prophetically about the abuse and the oppression that is happening in the kingdom. It is not someone down below who is trying to speak up and be dismissive or deceitful or trying to cause trouble. It is someone in power who is using that power to suppress the voice of God and the will of God in the world, and somehow, we flip that narrative on its head, so that when people speak up to power, they have a Jezebel spirit within them. They are the ones causing the problem, and we can have this idea that women in power equals evil, because Jezebel, she was in power, and that did not go so well, but the story of scripture is actually trying to make a far more nuanced point. Jezebel is not dangerous because she is in power. Jezebel is dangerous because she is evil and in power, and there is a distinct difference there in how we understand the story.

We often use this idea of Jezebel as a person who is causing trouble, but in the story, she is the one silencing the prophet. She is the one who is creating oppression and abuse. That is the Jezebel spirit, and so we have to be careful about how we understand this story and how quickly we just throw around those types of terms, because as you will see in the story, Ahab is completely passive, completely holds back, does not engage at all, just recedes, and Jezebel is the one who commits the crime, but as you will see, when God sees what happens, He confronts both of them, and both are held accountable. In fact, He sends his prophet to Ahab before He sends his prophet to Jezebel, and it should tell us something about how God sees the story, that even though Jezebel was the wicked one committing all of the crime, the husband, the king, is the one who is still accountable, because he neglected his responsibility, and so God sees what has happened, and his heart is grieved. He is angry at the injustice that has been done to Naboth, the way that his name has been taken in vain in this worship service, in this farce of a fast that has been enacted in order to simply steal one man’s property, and so he comes to Elijah, one of his faithful prophets, and he says, “I want you to go to Ahab, and you are going to find him in the garden that he just took from Naboth, the garden that he just stole by committing murder against Naboth.” God puts the murder at Ahab’s feet, and He says, “When you go to him, I want you to give him this message, that one day, the garden where the dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, who was stoned to death, those same dogs will come, and they will lick up the blood of Ahab.”

It is like a mic drop, pathetic, like God is not playing around in this moment, and so Elijah goes, and he finds Ahab in Naboth’s vineyard, and this is what Ahab says when he sees Elijah coming to him. He says, “So you have found me, my enemy.” Now can you imagine that greeting for your pastor or priest? Like let’s say I just go, and I knock on your door, and I am like, “Just wanted to check in on you, making sure you are doing all right. School is about to start. You guys are going back. Like, how are things going?” You open the door, and you are like, “So you found me, my enemy.” Like, what kind of greeting is that, and here is the deal. Ahab immediately knows this is not the first time Elijah has had to confront him for his sin and for his corruption. He knows what is about to happen, and so he is just this annoyed king. Like, “Really, we have to do this again?” and Elijah says, “Yeah, I found you, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord.”

That is a really important phrase that we are going to come back to. “You sold yourself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, and this is what the Lord says: ‘I am going to bring disaster on you. I will wipe out your descendants and cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel, slave or free. I will make your house like that of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, and that of Baasha, son of Ahijah.’” You probably do not know who they are, but it sounds like nothing good happened to them, right? “‘Because you have aroused my anger and have caused Israel to sin,’ and also concerning Jezebel, the Lord says, ‘Dogs will devour Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel, the place where you all stole the vineyard.’”

Now this is a moment where scripture just seems a little dark. Like you do not necessarily expect God to say dogs are going to devour the flesh of your wife. That is just not the picture, you would expect that in a Quentin Tarantino movie, right? That is what I imagine. I have probably never seen them, but that is what I imagine people would think at this moment. I mean, it seems violent, and yet, here is the thing that we have to understand. It is that the punishment that God says will happen to these people is essentially exactly the same punishment of how they have been ruling and treating others, and then it goes on in verse 25 and 26, and it says this: “There has never been anyone like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord.” There is that line again, “Urged on by Jezebel, his wife, he behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols like the Amorites the Lord drove out before Israel,” so twice in the story that phrase is used. He sold himself. Ahab sold himself to get what he thought he wanted. He sold himself.

It is very interesting language. It is trying to draw attention to this idea that there was something about Ahab that he wanted this vineyard. He wanted the things that he wanted so badly that he was willing to put a transactional price on his own self, that he was willing to sell his soul to get what he wanted in life, and it did not matter how much money he had to spend. It did not matter what he had to do to get the thing that he wanted. Naboth was the only righteous person in this story who was obeying God. He was following God’s design, and his desire was to follow God. Naboth could have made all the money that he wanted. He could have had anything he wanted for his vineyard, but he chose to follow God.

It is as if there is this contrast, and actually my wife helped me see this as we were talking through this story. It is as if there is this contrast. There is Ahab, who is willing to sell himself, sell himself no matter what it costs, to get what he wanted, his integrity, his worth, and anything that he could give up in order to get what he wanted. He was willing to sell himself. Naboth, on the other hand, was not even willing to sell his vineyard to the king, because he wanted to be someone who was obedient to God’s law. For Naboth, obedience to God was more important than anything he could gain personally in this world, but not for Ahab. Ahab wanted the stuff he wanted, the things that he could get in the world. Obedience to God was secondary to the desires of his heart, and he wanted the vineyard, so he sulked when he did not get it. His wife lied, cheated, and plotted murder to get it for him, and he was passive through the whole thing. He sold himself to get this vineyard.

I need you to think for a moment. There are a few possessions that I have that have a lot of sentimental value for me, for example when my grandfather passed away, he gave me two things, his pocketknife, and his watch, not very valuable in worldly terms, but that mean a lot to me, because they were his. I want you to imagine for a moment I took that watch and that pocketknife, and I went to a pawn shop, and I sold it for a few hundred bucks, so that I could get tickets to the Broncos-Cowboys game coming up this year. Yeah, that is going to be a great Sunday, when we all have to endure that together. I

will probably be sick that day, and you will not see me, but I want you to imagine that that is what I sell it for, right? Something that has, like, not very much value in the world, but a ton of value to me, and I sell it for just like one afternoon of really bad entertainment for me as a Cowboys fan and great entertainment for you as a Broncos fan, and I just give all of that up, because I want this other thing. That is the picture that scripture is trying to paint of what Ahab has done. There is something that he has of immense worth and value, himself, his soul, and he is willing to give it up for just a small plot of land. That is where his value lies. That is what he thinks is more important.

So, here is the question for us: “What ruled Ahab’s heart?” What was it that was in Ahab’s heart that caused him to go down this road? He was a king. He could have had anything he wanted. He did not need this vineyard for anything. It would have been nice to have, sure, but he has plenty of things. He has everything that he would want or need. He has all the wealth that He could ask for, but then in this moment there are these small compromises that happen over time, and he slowly gets to the place where he is willing to give up his soul for this small vineyard, one compromise at a time, one instance of, “It is not that big a deal. It is just a little thing. It is just Naboth. He is a little person.” One corner cut here, one half-truth, over time, and he has gotten to this place where he was willing to sell himself to get the vineyard he wanted.

I want you to turn to your neighbor now, and I want you to try to answer this question: “What do they think ruled Ahab’s heart?” and then we are going to land the plane. What do you think ruled Ahab’s heart? Turn and tell someone your best guess, and we will see who gets the answer right on the test. You have like fifteen seconds. Five more seconds. All right. What rules Ahab’s heart? What do you think? Best guess, you can just start shouting them out. I will try to catch them. What is it? What? Materialism. Great guess. All right, love that one. What else? Greed. Pride. Awesome. What else? Himself. Yeah. Excellent answer. What else? Instant gratification. Awesome. Okay, I think all of these are true, so it is a test where everybody passes, yay, like Montessori or something. My wife is going to be mad at me about that one later, so everybody passes. Now, here is the thing. This is why this question is important. It is because it does not actually tell us in the story what ruled his heart, because I think that all of us, if we are honest with ourselves, we can see ourselves in the story, where there are different places where we are willing to sell ourselves for the things that we want in this world.

As I was thinking about it, I think there is one that maybe encapsulates all of the things that were just thrown out and mentioned in your conversation or thrown out into the room, and it is something that I think is so pervasive in our culture, and I think as I look at it and examine Ahab’s heart, what I think ruled his heart is this idea right here “I deserve.” “I deserve.” He was living with this mentality that as king he deserved whatever he wanted, and so when he did not get what he wanted, he pouted and sulked, and the only way that it made him happy was when he got what he thought he deserved. Now here is the danger about this mindset of “I deserve.” It feels positive, right? Like if something bad happens to you, and you think like, “Oh, you know what? Like, I just went through this really hard time. Maybe God owes me, and I deserve to have something better come into my life.” It sounds fair. It sounds like healthy boundaries and self-respect and knowing your worth, which are all things that we elevate as idols in our culture, but you know what happens when this idea of “I deserve” runs rampant in a society, when “I deserve” rules the throne of our hearts?

It warps our moral compass. We start bending the rules and cutting the corners and convincing ourselves that the end justifies the means. When “I deserve” rules, the throne of our hearts, it blinds us to the needs of others. People stop being neighbors or image-bearers, and they simply become obstacles or steppingstones in between us and what we want. The “I deserve” ruling on our hearts erodes gratitude. It is this belief that life owes you, God owes you, and if you stop seeing blessings as something that are a gift from God and as something that you deserve, something that is essentially a delayed payment that is owed to you, and it can lead to discontentment. No matter what you get, it is never enough, because you deserve more.

This is so prevalent in our culture, isn't it? We live in a world that lives with the motto, “treat yourself.” It is the highest moral good. Get what you want, because you are worth it. You deserve it, and underneath it all, is this subtle belief that I deserve what I want. I deserve to be happy no matter what it costs. I deserve the promotion, even if I have to undermine a coworker. I deserve the relationship, even though it means stepping outside of God's design for relationship. I deserve the lifestyle, even if it buries me in debt, and we live in a culture that normalizes this idea of bending morality to get what you want, to justify getting the things that we want by any means necessary, and it could be the job. It could be the career. It could be the relationship. I do not know what the vineyard is for you, but I do know this. If you have the same ruler in your heart as Ahab, then slowly overtime you may find yourself in a place where you have made compromise after compromise after compromise to get what you want, to the neglect of what God has called you to do with your life. That is a scary reality for us to wrestle with.

There is a term in our culture that Simon Sinek came up with that I think encapsulates a lot of what we have been talking about. He calls it “ethical fading.” This is what he says about ethical fading: “Ethical fading is a condition and a culture that allows people to act in unethical ways in order to advance their own interests, often at the expense of others, while falsely believing that they have not compromised their own moral principles.” Do you see the slippery slope there? “Ethical fading often starts with small, seemingly innocuous transgressions, that when left unchecked, continue to grow and compound.” I mean, he could have just inserted the word “sin” into that place of ethical fading.

The reality is this story of Ahab is not just this disturbing blip on Israel's history. It is a mirror. It is a case study of how hearts get sold, and here is the reality. Here is the truth of the story that I have been wrestling with this week. When we live with this idea of “I deserve” on my heart, we almost always, always overestimate what we are owed, don't we? Like when I think, “I deserve,” I am so willing to say “Oh yeah, I deserve that. I deserve that. I deserve that. I deserve what is owed me,” and we can vastly overestimate what is actually owed to us and vastly underestimate the cost that it will take to get it. That is what happened to Ahab. He got the vineyard. He got the prize. He got what he wanted, but in the process, he lost something far more valuable, his integrity, his obedience to God, and ultimately his soul and his life.

I think the dark irony when we buy this lie of “I deserve,” is that we will often actually end up getting what we want, but we will often find out what we got is not what we wanted. Jesus says the same thing in his teaching in Matthew 16:26. He says, “What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world and yet sell their soul, forfeit their soul, or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?” When “I deserve” rules your heart, you may get the vineyard, whatever that represents. You may get the job, the

relationship, the career, the recognition, the lifestyle, or the house, but you will find out according to Jesus, that what it costs you will often leave you emptier than before. You will be empty in what matters most.

So, as we close our time together today, I want to present this question to you, and it might feel like a pointed question, but I think it is a really important question for us to consider in light of the story, and the question is this, “Have you sold yourself?” or maybe more pointedly, “Where have you sold yourself?” Where are those places in your life and your soul where you have made that small compromise after small compromise after small compromise to get what you want, knowing that it is taking you further and further away from the person God has called you to be? That is the story of Ahab. God had called him to be king. He gave him all the opportunity to live out this shepherding role over the people of Israel, to protect the people, to care for the law, and he turned his back on all of it, because he wanted the things that this world had to offer. Have you made that same bargain?

So, here is the chance for us to respond. It is I am going to create a moment for you to just pray, invite the Holy Spirit to search your heart, to search for the places where you might have made that bargain, where you might be willing to make that trade. It might even be an area where you have had no awareness until this moment that you have just been making those compromises, and then now you found yourself in a place where, “I am on a path I did not even recognize,” and so I am not going to invite you to stand. I want you to stay in your seats in a moment of prayer, and then the band will lead us through a song to help us reflect and ask the Spirit to find those places in our lives where we have sold ourselves, and then we will respond and worship after that, but let me pray for you as we enter this time.

Heavenly Father, God, I pray that in this moment we would not rush past what you might have for us. God, I ask that we would not just simply move through this moment and not take the time to reflect and to think about what might be going on in our lives and the places where we may have made that compromise or we may have been willing to sell ourselves to gain the things of this world. Father, the story of Ahab can serve as a warning for us today that we may get what we want, but we will lose something far more valuable in that bargain. God, I pray that you would give us the strength to repent in those areas where we need to repent, that you would give us the courage to confront the sin in our lives or the lack of obedience or the ways that our hearts have been ruled by this idea of “I deserve,” the way that it may have infected our marriages or our relationship with our children, our coworkers, or just all of life, that life is not fair because it has not given us what we deserve. God, the truth is that we do not deserve any of it, and we should just have hands of gratitude for any blessing you give, but we live in a world that tells us a lie completely different than that, so I pray now by the power of your Spirit that you would give us the space we need to confront that, that we could repent where we need to repent, where we could be encouraged, and where we could move more towards you in this moment, and it is in Christ’s name we pray, amen.

As we close our time together today, the conclusion to that story about Ahab and Jezebel is the end of the story is essentially that Ahab partially, half-heartedly repents, and Jezebel does not, and what comes to pass is essentially God shows mercy to Ahab, and many of the things that were proclaimed over his life in judgment. Even with just partial repentance, God changes and shows him mercy, and Jezebel, who does not repent, who does not ask for forgiveness at all, experiences the complete loss of her life, and so the invitation there is even today, if you are thinking about what we talked about, and you think, “I do not

know,” even just partial repentance can start opening the heart and to experience God’s mercy. Let me pray for us now as we close our time together.

Heavenly Father, as we go from here, Lord, may we go with the knowledge of your mercy and your grace, even for just partial repenters, people who are still trying to figure out repentance, people who are still not even sure what it is that they are supposed to repent of, God, I just pray that we would continue down that journey and open ourselves to you, so that we could experience your transformation, but also your grace and your mercy, and it is in Christ’s name that we pray these things, amen. You can go in peace.

47:00 minutes

Edited by Tom Kenaston

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