

A Spiritual Seminar

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Preacher: Rev. Murdo M Campbell

[0 : 00] Well, if we could for a short while, and with the Lord's help, this evening, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, 1 Kings chapter 21, 1 Kings chapter 21, we're going to look at the whole chapter, but if we read again at verse 5, 1 Kings 21 and verse 5, but Jezebel, his wife, came to him and said to him, why is your spirit so vexed that you eat no food?

And 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 please you, I will give you another vineyard for it.

And he answered, I will not give you my vineyard. And Jezebel, his wife, said to him, do you now govern Israel? Arise and eat bread, and let your heart be cheerful.

I will give you the vineyard of Naboth, the Jezreelite. Treat others the way you would like yourself to be treated.

Be kind to one another. Be gentle with one another. Turn the other cheek. Love one another as Jesus loves you.

[1 : 25] If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all. And you know, these are only some of the phrases and pieces of advice that I'm sure that we were all given in our youth.

We're very familiar with them because we were brought up with them. We were reminded again and again that we need to show love and kindness to one another. And in many ways, we should be thankful for our upbringing and how we were taught and the way we were shaped.

Because when we come to this chapter, we see that Queen Jezebel never learned that advice in her youth. And if she did, well, she never took it on board. Because Jezebel never learned to treat others the way she would like to be treated.

Jezebel wasn't kind or gentle. Jezebel never turned the other cheek. And Jezebel certainly didn't follow the practice that if you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all.

Jezebel was a godless woman who had influenced an equally godless man. And their godlessness, as we've seen over the past few weeks, it had a major impact upon their rule and government within the northern kingdom of Israel.

[2 : 41] Because, well, as we've seen in the last few chapters, we've seen when even when Elijah appeared back in chapter 17, we saw that the kingdom of Israel was in a spiritual state.

The kingdom was in a spiritual mess. And they were in this spiritual state because the covenant king, Ahab, he had led the covenant people who were Israel into what was covenant unfaithfulness.

They were idolatrous. And this was triggered and it was all brought to the fore because Ahab married Jezebel. Because when Jezebel, when she moved into the palace, when she moved into the kingdom, she brought all her baggage with her.

She brought all her prophets. And she brought, most importantly, she brought her god, Baal. And once idolatry entered the kingdom, the hearts of the people were then divided.

Their allegiance was divided. Their commitment to the Lord became half-hearted. And because of this, the Lord brought a covenant curse of drought upon the land.

[3 : 45] There was to be no rain. We've seen this. There was no rain for three and a half years. And so the kingdom was in a spiritual state, which led to this spiritual showdown on the top of Mount Carmel.

After three years of drought and a nationwide famine and many people starving to death, and Baal had done nothing about it. After all of that, Elijah boldly confronted the prophets of Baal.

And he questioned the Lord's people on the top of Mount Carmel as to why they were still limping between two different opinions. Why were they still half-hearted in their commitment to the Lord?

And Elijah, he gave the Lord's people an ultimatum. If the Lord is God, follow him. But if it's Baal, that's your God, follow him. And as we saw in chapter 18, the Lord answered by fire.

The Lord proved that he was the sovereign God who was to be worshipped. But then having been warned about the spiritual state of the kingdom and having witnessed the spiritual showdown of fire falling from heaven on the top of Mount Carmel, you know, what we saw last week is that the hearts of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, they were only hardening.

[5 : 03] They weren't softening. Elijah, as we saw in chapter 19, he ran away from all his problems.

He ran away from all those who were causing the problems in his life. And he came and sat under the juniper tree and he just said to the Lord, take away my life for I'm no better than my father's.

Elijah had given up altogether. He'd given up on King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. But you know, as we saw last week, the Lord wasn't done with Elijah. The Lord raised Elijah up from his spiritual slump.

The Lord preached to Elijah a spiritual sermon. And the Lord recommissioned Elijah for spiritual service. The Lord wasn't done with Elijah because the Lord told Elijah to go and call Elisha and prepare for the next generation of serving the Lord.

But you know, more than that, the Lord told Elijah to go and confront Ahab one last time. And that's what we see here in chapter 21.

[6 : 19] And there are three things that I just wanted to draw out from this chapter. Because in this chapter, we're given what you could call a spiritual seminar on godlessness.

It's a spiritual seminar on godlessness. And the headings of the spiritual seminar on godlessness are a godless greed, a godless government, and a godless guarantee.

A godless greed, a godless government, and a godless guarantee. So let's look first of all at a godless greed. Look at verse 1.

We're told, You know, in his brilliant commentary on 1 Kings, Dale Ralph Davis, he just sets the scene for this chapter.

He writes, It's only a vineyard. The king wants the vineyard, but the king does not need the vineyard. And the owner is unwilling to part with the vineyard.

[7 : 58] Yet that's not the end of it. For coveting and sulking combine with power and cruelty to produce oppression and destruction. All for a vineyard.

And you know, on the face of it, it seems so trivial. Why does King Ahab want a vineyard? Especially when he doesn't need the vineyard. And as the king of Israel, he has many vineyards in Jezreel.

But we're told in verse 1 that Naboth's vineyard, it was next door to the palace in Jezreel. Now the palace in Jezreel was a second home. It was a holiday home for Ahab and Jezreel.

It wasn't their permanent residence. Because their permanent residence was a wee bit south in Samaria. And Naboth's vineyard, it was just a vineyard, a little vineyard in the fertile land of Jezreel.

So why bother yourself about this little vineyard and this small town vine dresser called Naboth? Why bother yourself about him? But of course the root cause of Ahab's demand for Naboth's land was his godless greed.

[9 : 10] And you know, when you think about it, is that not what most of the fallouts within families or villages or towns or nations, is that not what most of them are about? Is that not what most of the wars in the past have been about?

Is that not what most of the wars in the present are about? They're all about land or religion. But the root cause of them, as it was with Ahab, the root cause is godless greed.

The root cause is godless greed. And we read in verse 2 that Ahab said to Naboth, give me your vineyard. Ahab doesn't ask for Naboth's vineyard.

He demands it. He commands. It's an imperative. He commands Naboth to give it to him. Ahab gives this sovereign decree that Naboth should just hand over his land for a fair deal.

After this, Ahab said to Naboth, give me your vineyard that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it's near my house. And I will give you a better vineyard for it. Or if it seems good to you, I will give you its value in money.

[10 : 20] Ahab says to Naboth, deal or no deal? And Naboth responds to Ahab with a resounding no deal. But you know, Naboth's response wasn't because Ahab didn't offer the right price.

And it wasn't because he didn't give the right terms and conditions on the deal. No, Naboth's refusal to give Ahab his own vineyard was because Naboth's land was covenant land.

It was covenant land that had been passed down to him from the generations before him. It had been passed down from generation to generation. And Naboth knew that his land was part of the covenant promise.

Because you'll remember that when the Lord brought Abraham into the promised land, the Lord brought Abraham to the promised land and said to him, he gave him the covenant promise.

The Lord said to Abraham, to your offspring, I will give this land. Which means that the promised land was a land of promise. It was part of the covenant.

[11 : 27] And after centuries of waiting and decades of wandering through the wilderness, the children of Israel, who were the descendants of Abraham, they finally crossed over the river Jordan and they entered into the promised land.

And each tribe, you'll remember, they all received an apportionment of the land of promise. And that land, it was to be passed down from generation to generation.

It was to stay within the family because it was part of the covenant promise given to Abraham. But you know, as the covenant king, Ahab had completely ignored the covenant promise.

Ahab had forgotten that Naboth's vineyard was a covenant gift from the covenant God. And Naboth, he wasn't willing to give up his land and give it to a king who was unfaithful to God's covenant promise.

Because Ahab, well, he had been unfaithful. He had brought Jezebel into the land. Ahab had brought idols into the land. Ahab had brought drought upon the land.

[12 : 34] And so in many ways, you can see that Naboth, he had completely lost respect for who was meant to be his spiritual leader. Naboth had no respect for Ahab.

And you know, it's not good when you lose respect for your spiritual leader. Because you will listen to nothing that they have to say. But you know, Naboth knew that King Ahab, he had no interest in the Lord.

He had no interest in the covenant. Which is why Naboth says to Ahab, No deal. The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my father.

But look how Ahab responds in verse 4. Ahab went into his house, vexed and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said.

For he had said, I will not give you the inheritance of my father. And he lay down on his bed, turned away his face, and would eat no food. And you know, when you look at Ahab, do you not think to yourself, Ahab, grow up.

[13 : 42] Get a grip of yourself. It's only a vineyard. Ahab, this is childish. This is a childish reaction to Naboth's refusal. But you know, Ahab's reaction is evidence of the fact that his heart and his mind were consumed by godless greed.

There was nothing else on Ahab's mind. Naboth's vineyard is all that Ahab wanted. And if he can't get it, he goes on a huff, like a spoilt little child.

But you know, what we ought to see is that Ahab's heart is hardening. Hardening all the time because he's still seeking his own gain. He's still obsessed with his godless greed.

And that's because when the Lord is not first in your life, when the Lord is not your priority, when the Lord is not your focus, when you don't find satisfaction and joy and happiness in the Lord's salvation, that's when we have the heart of Ahab.

That's when godless greed takes over. That's when self and gain become our priority. That's when the Lord is not Lord over our whole life and enthroned upon our heart.

[14 : 54] And you know, what we see by the end of the chapter, and Ahab is going to learn it very soon, he's going to learn what Jesus said to us in the gospel. What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?

And so in this spiritual seminar on godlessness, we've seen a godless greed, but that resulted in a godless government. A godless government.

Look at verse 5. But Jezebel were told, his wife came to him and said to him, Why is your spirit so vexed that you eat no food? And 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 please you, I will give you another vineyard for it.

And he answered, I will not give you my vineyard. And Jezebel, his wife, said to him, Do you now govern Israel? Arise and eat bread and let your heart be cheerful. I will give you the vineyard of Naboth, the Jezreelite.

And so Ahab, as he hides in his bedroom, just lying on his bed with the curtains closed and the lights off, and he's staring at the wall, starving himself from food and sulking in the darkness, in walks Jezebel.

[16 : 09] You can just imagine it. And she's wondering why her husband is in such a mood. Because he won't come down for dinner. But as Ahab explains to his wife what's happened and that Naboth has said to him, No deal.

Jezebel is completely confused. And she asks King Ahab, Do you now govern Israel? In other words, Jezebel is saying to him, What's the problem?

Are you not the king? Do you not have all authority in the land of Israel? And Jezebel says to her petty husband, Get up, get a grip, and get downstairs and eat your dinner.

I will give you the vineyard of Naboth, the Jezreelite. But you know, there's one piece of information that Ahab failed to explain to his wife.

And that was the real reason Naboth refused to give Ahab his vineyard. All Ahab told Jezebel was that Naboth said, No deal. But Ahab knew that the real reason Naboth refused him was because of his covenant unfaithfulness to the Lord by marrying Jezebel and worshipping all her gods.

[17 : 24] But you know, if Ahab, if he wanted a happy wife, he thought that the best thing to do was not to tell her the whole truth. But when is it ever good to withhold the truth from your wife and lie to her?

And you know, deep down, Ahab knew that Naboth was right. Ahab knew that Elijah was right. And Ahab knew that he had led the kingdom of Israel into a spiritual state of darkness.

Ahab knew that his responsibility was to lead the people of Israel to worship the Lord. He knew that what the law of God said, that thou shalt have no other gods before me.

But Ahab had married a godless and lawless wife. And as soon as she heard that Naboth refused Ahab's request, she does what every godless and lawless person does.

She took the law into her own hands. And you know, I say this because Jezebel's worldview was that she made up the laws of the land to suit herself and to please all her wants.

[18 : 38] She didn't follow the laws of the Lord. She didn't subscribe to the word of God. She didn't even consider her conscience as her guide. Jezebel took the law into her own hands and made the law suit herself and whatever she wanted to do with it.

She wanted to do as she pleased. And you know, my friend, Jezebel did what every godless and lawless person does. They do what is right in their own eyes.

And what happened? She produced a godless government. And you know, when we look at our nation today and all the laws that have been passed through our parliaments, both in Holyrood and Westminster, we can see that it's the same issue that was in the days of Elijah.

We have a godless government with many godless and lawless people seeking to do what's right in their own eyes. And that's why we have all these laws that are being passed which contradict and fly in the face of the word of God.

That's why we have a godless government that governs for the 1% of our nation. And it's all encouraged and supported and backed by the media. That's why we have an ever-increasing nation that's anti-Christian, that seeks to oppress and obliterate the voice of Christ in our nation.

[20 : 01] And I know that there are many Christians in Parliament and many Christians in our councils. But the reality is we all know that there's an agenda to squash and to squeeze out any Christian voice in our nation.

And you know, our godless government, it's so like the godless government of Elijah's day because Jezebel, she wanted to promote her religion.

She wanted to promote her worldview and her own agenda. And in doing so, Jezebel wanted to silence anyone who spoke out against her agenda or contradicted her rule or her reign.

And the same is through today because it's becoming increasingly difficult as we see again and again on the news. It's becoming increasingly difficult to stand up for the truth and speak out for Christ.

But you know, this chapter, it ought to remind us, even though it looks messy, it ought to remind us that the Lord is sovereign. He's enthroned on high.

[21 : 10] He's seeing it all. He's still the judge. And amazingly, he's still working all things together for good and ultimately for his glory.

And yet, when we look at what Jezebel did to Naboth, we think, how can this be for good and for God's glory? Because when we read further on in the chapter, we see Jezebel using King Ahab's letterheads and she writes and she writes all these letters to the elders and nobles in Jezreel and she says to them, proclaim a fast.

They're to set aside a day of prayer to fast and pray to the Lord, the covenant God and the elders and the nobles they're to make Naboth, they're to make him the leader of this day of prayer.

It was an evil plan because Jezebel knew that Naboth loved and honoured the Lord. Jezebel knew that Naboth would be more than willing to lead the people in Jezreel in this day of prayer.

But more than that, Jezebel would have known that Ahab's sulking would have made Naboth think that Ahab's conscience was bothering him and that if Ahab's dark and idolatrous kingdom needed anything, it needed the Lord's people to gather together for a day of prayer.

[22 : 32] And that's what we needed last Friday. We needed the Lord's people to gather together for a day of prayer. And yet for Jezebel here, she knew that she could have Naboth right where she wanted him.

She could have two men then come in and act as witnesses, which is what the law required, and they could accuse Naboth for cursing God and cursing the king, which was an act of treason and he would deserve the death penalty.

Jezebel had hatched this evil and cunning plan that worked to perfection. We're told down in verse 11, And the men of his city, the elders and the leaders who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them.

As it is written in the letters that she had sent to them, they proclaimed a fast and set Naboth at the head of the people. And the two worthless men came in and sat opposite him. And the worthless men brought a charge against Naboth in the presence of the people, saying, Naboth cursed God and the king.

So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death with stones. Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, Naboth has been stoned, he is dead. As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, 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.

[24 : 01] But you know, what we have to notice in all those verses we've just read is that Naboth doesn't speak. Naboth doesn't retaliate.

Naboth doesn't even proclaim his innocence. He opened not his mouth. And the way the narrative's written, that's intentional because it should point us towards the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Because when we consider what happened to Jesus, he too confronted and challenged the godless greed of his day. He too had false witnesses who spoke out against him.

He too had a godless government that sentenced him to death. And yet, he opened not his mouth. And you know, when we think of Naboth and how he suffered injustice in his life, it should not only make us think of Jesus, but it should also make us think of all the other Christians who were in the first century right up until the 21st century.

Those who are still suffering injustice because they love the Lord. And you know, do you remember what the Apostle Peter said to the church? He said, if when you do good and suffer for it and you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.

[25 : 30] For to this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.

When he was reviled, he did not revile in return. When he suffered, he did not threaten, but he continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

He continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. And those words are the words that should describe Naboth in his suffering.

He continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. And that's what we see in this last section. Ahab and Jezebel, they judged unjustly.

But the Lord, we see, he judges justly. And so in this spiritual seminar on godlessness, we have, we've seen a godless greed which resulted in a godless government, but it all ended with a godless guarantee.

[26 : 38] A godless guarantee. We see in verse 16. And as soon as Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab arose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth, the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Arise, go down to meet Ahab, king of Israel, who is in Samaria. Behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone to take possession.

And you shall say to him, Thus says the Lord, Have you killed and also taken possession? And you shall say to him, Thus says the Lord, in the place where the dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick your own blood.

As soon as Naboth is dead, King Ahab, he has come out of his sulk. He's almost skipping with joy as he goes down towards Naboth's vineyard to see what he has acquired for himself.

But as Ahab makes his way towards his new garden, Elijah is once again commissioned to go and confront the godless greed and the godless government of Israel's king.

[27 : 46] But this time, King Ahab, we see that he's gone too far. He's gone too far. And the thing is, the Lord will only let us go so far in our sin before he stops us.

And the Lord will stop us. This is what we've been reminded here. The Lord will stop us and sometimes he will even remove us from the scene of time because of the extent of our sin.

And that's what we see with Ahab. We must never forget that although the Lord is merciful and gracious, he is also a just judge. He judges justly and he will bring judgment upon sin and he will vindicate his people.

But when Elijah came to confront Ahab, the word of the Lord wasn't a word of national judgment like it was before with the drought. It was a word of personal judgment.

Elijah says, Thus says the Lord, In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your own blood. But notice how Ahab responds to Elijah in verse 20.

[28 : 56] Ahab said to Elijah, Have you found me, O my enemy? Then Elijah answers, I have found you because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord.

Behold, I will bring disaster upon you. I will utterly burn you up and will cut off from Ahab every male bond and free in Israel. And I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, and like the house of Basha, the son of Ahijah, for the anger to which you have provoked me and because you have made Israel to sin.

And of Jezebel, the Lord also said, The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the walls of Jezreel. Ahab viewed Elijah's role and his message as the enemy.

He didn't like hearing anything from the Lord. But Elijah just confirms to King Ahab that he is the enemy. He's the Lord's enemy because he has sold himself for the sake of Naboth's vineyard.

And the Lord's judgment upon Ahab and his family, it's solemn and it's chilling because, as we said, in the words of Jesus, by killing Naboth, Ahab thought that he had gained the whole world.

[30 : 11] But in doing so, he had lost his own soul. In fact, the narrator, he slips in a description of King Ahab in verse 25. You see it there if you're using the Pew Bible.

It's in brackets. There's this narrator's interlude where he just describes Ahab. He says, It's a very sad description of a man who was meant to lead the Lord's people towards covenant faithfulness and commitment.

And yet, all that could be said about him was that he sold himself. to do what was evil in the sight of the Lord. And then you come into chapter 22.

And the Lord, we see there, he fulfills his judgment upon King Ahab. In chapter 22, you can read it when you go home. But Ahab, he allies himself with King Jehoshaphat who was the king of the southern kingdom of Judah.

They go out to fight against the king of Syria. But in the midst of battle, Ahab is badly wounded. And he's carried off. As he's carried off the battlefield, he's bleeding to death.

[31 : 36] And we're told in verse 37 of chapter 22, we're told, So the king died and was brought to Samaria. And they buried the king in Samaria.

And they washed the chariot by the pool of Samaria. And the dogs licked up his blood. And the prostitutes washed themselves in it according to the word of the Lord that Elijah had spoken.

The Lord was true to his word. The Lord brought judgment upon Ahab. The Lord brought justice for Naboth.

And the Lord brought vindication for his people. And you know, that's the promise of scripture. It's through much tribulation that we enter the kingdom.

We may suffer affliction and persecution in our faith. But the Lord promises justice. He promises vindication for his people. The Lord guarantees to the godless that they will be punished for their sin.

[32 : 40] And this is what, you know, this is what Paul meant when he reminded the Thessalonians that when they were being persecuted for their faith and unjustly treated because they were Christians. Paul said, God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might. You know, it's a solemn message.

But the Bible is not full of idealism. The Bible is full of realism. And that's what we learn from this spiritual seminar of godlessness.

That a godless greed in the heart of King Ahab resulted in a godless government in the name of King Ahab. But it all ended with a godless guarantee given to King Ahab.

Thus says the Lord, in the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick up your own blood. It's a solemn chapter. 1 Kings chapter 21.

[34 : 05] It's a spiritual seminar on godlessness. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion.

I know the time has gone. And we're going to sing in Psalm 96. Psalm 96. We're going to sing from verse 11 down to the end of the psalm.

Psalm 96 from verse 11. These verses in conclusion to God's praise.

Let him be glad before the Lord and let the earth rejoice.

Let season and all that is therein cry out and make the noise.

[35 : 34] Let him rejoice and everything God springeth of the earth.

Let woods and every tree shall sing with gladness with gladness and with myrrh.

For the Lord because he comes to judge the earth comes he.

He'll judge the world with righteousness with righteousness the people faithfully.

the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore.

[36 : 44] Amen.