



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

1 Kings 21: 1-29

Lesson 4 of 6

2020

"Naboth's Vineyard"

TRANSCRIPT

Elder, Mark Newman with opening greetings:

Hear the Word of the LORD: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change and though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; though its waters roar *and* foam, though the mountains quake at its swelling pride. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy dwelling places of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she will not be moved..." (Ps 46:1-5).

"...now, thus says the LORD, your Creator, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you: I have called you by name; you are Mine! When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior... "" (Isa 43 1-3).

A good Lord's day morning to all of you. We are thankful this morning, for many things, but I must say, today we are thankful for the wonders of modern technology which allows all of us beleaguered, cabin fevered, members of the body of Christ to enjoy the Ministry of the Word of God this morning.

If we have visitors tuning in with us for the first time this morning, we especially welcome you, and trust you will be blessed by hearing the scriptures read, and this message proclaimed, that Dan has prepared. And when things return to normal, we invite you to come and join us in person. We are missing that personal connection, aren't we? That is something that's vital for community. 40, 50 years ago we used to call that 'Body Life'. And so we have lost that connection.

But we want you to know that we understand the importance of the members of the body of Christ having venues available to avoid the kind of social isolation that some of us are feeling today. Many of you who are enduring difficult life trials; you've lost family members, you're enduring difficult illnesses, financial challenges, perhaps even just loneliness. So we have some initiatives underway ... want you to know that ... that will help bridge that isolation and enable us to continue with the ministries that have been ongoing, such as the Bible studies and the prayer ministries.

But also, you may just miss the personal interaction that we have with one another with fellow members. So we want to encourage you to use your phones, not just to text, not just to browse the Internet, but to actually call one another and have a conversation with each other. You have been doing that, I know, but let me add that if you would like to request that someone from the church give you a call, please contact the church office, or call me and let us know, and someone will reach out to you.

The Lord bless you all. Let us remember to pray for one another. The prayer requests are in the bulletin that was sent out via email, and so please note those prayer requests and others that you know individually. Let us remember to pray for one another, to help one another, to trust in a faithful Lord to strengthen us to cope with this unusual situation that we find ourselves in.

And now, open your hearts to hear the Ministry of the Word, as Dan comes forward to read our scripture passage for this morning.

Elder, Pastor-Teacher, Dan Duncan with Scripture reading and Message for today,

Thank you Mark, for those excellent words, and good morning. Indeed, these are strange times we are living in; and as I look out on an almost empty audience, I'm reminded of that. And what I can say is, 'The LORD is on His throne—and this is the day that He has made.' And so, while I don't know, and you don't know, when this is going to end and how it's going to end, we know this—it will end. And for God's people it will end well. We have that confidence from the Word of God. And so we can trust Him in the midst of it.

The passage that we will look at this morning, 1 Kings, chapter 21, is a passage that I did not choose for this particular day or occasion. But as I read it and reflect upon it, I think it is an excellent passage for this day and time. It speaks to the very things that I have just said; that the LORD God, in the midst of difficulty, is on His throne, and working things out according to His will and for the good of His people. It is a passage that is in our series on the 'Life and Times of Elijah, The Prophet'. We have been out of that for what, three weeks now? And so, if you'll remember, the last event in Elijah's life was his flight from Jezebel, and her threat to make him like he had made the prophets of Baal. He had killed them after his great, triumphant display on the Mount of Carmel, where he had challenged the prophets of Baal, and God had brought down fire to consume the altar. But thinking that perhaps revival would occur in the palace, he found just the opposite. And Jezebel threatened his life, and he fled and ran all the way down to Mt. Horeb, which is Mt. Sinai.

Well, that was chapter 19. And Chapter 20 is a chapter that does not include Elijah, (he is absent from those events). Ahab is fighting the Assyrians and wins a great battle and has great confidence in where he is. And yet he has a prophet that tells him things will not work so well for him after all. (1 Kings 20:41-43). Nevertheless, we pick up with a passage in chapter 21 where Elijah again appears:

¹Now it came about after these things that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which *was* in Jezreel beside the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. ²Ahab spoke to Naboth, saying, "Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden because it is close beside my house, and I will give you a better vineyard than it in its place; if you like, I will give you the price of it in money." ³But Naboth said to Ahab, "The LORD forbid me that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers." ⁴So Ahab came into his house sullen and vexed because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." And he lay down on his bed and turned away his face and ate no food.

⁵But Jezebel his wife came to him and said to him, "How is it that your spirit is so sullen that you are not eating food?" ⁶So 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 a vineyard in its place.' But he said, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'" ⁷Jezebel his wife said to him, "Do you now reign over Israel? Arise, eat bread, and let your heart be joyful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."

⁸So she wrote letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal, and sent letters to the elders and to the nobles who were living with Naboth in his city. ⁹Now she wrote in the letters, saying, "Proclaim a fast and seat Naboth at the head of the people; ¹⁰and seat two worthless men before him, and let them testify against him, saying, 'You cursed God and the king.' Then take him out and stone him to death."

¹¹So the men of his city, the elders and the nobles who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent *word* to them, just as it was written in the letters which she had sent them. ¹²They proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth at the head of the people. ¹³Then the two worthless men came in and sat before him; and the worthless men testified against him, even against Naboth, before the people, saying, "Naboth cursed God and the king." So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death with stones. ¹⁴Then they sent *word* to Jezebel, saying, "Naboth has been stoned, and is dead."

¹⁵When 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." ¹⁶When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab arose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

¹⁷Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, ¹⁸"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 down to take possession of it. ¹⁹You shall speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the LORD,

"Have you murdered and also taken possession?" ' And you shall speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the LORD, "In the place where the dogs licked up the blood of Naboth the dogs will lick up your blood, even yours." ' "

²⁰ Ahab said to Elijah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" And he answered, "I have found *you*, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the LORD. ²¹ Behold, I will bring evil upon you, and will utterly sweep you away, and will cut off from Ahab every male, both bond and free in Israel; ²² and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nabat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, because of the provocation with which you have provoked *Me* to anger, and *because* you have made Israel sin. ²³ Of Jezebel also has the LORD spoken, saying, 'The dogs will eat Jezebel in the district of Jezreel.'

1 Kings 21:1-23

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of studying it together. Let's bow together in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank You for Your goodness to us. We thank You that You see everything that's happening in the world around us and that Your eye is upon Your people, personally, individually. And You are guiding us with Your providential hand and we are to know that, we are to see that truth in the passage that we have read, which is a tragic passage. And yet, in the midst of it we can find great reason for rejoicing and Your grace in it. And I pray that You would help us to do that, help us to understand the things that we have read, and how they apply to us, and how they unfold Your greatness and glory. This should be an encouragement to us and is, in fact, the ground and basis for any encouragement that we have. And we have reason for encouragement every moment now in the same way as it would be if there were no problems around us at all. Because You are in control. As I said earlier, You are on Your throne, and we are to know that, and we are to rest in that. So encourage Your people and bless them. As we study this passage together, bless each one of us and build us up in the faith. Help us to get a glimpse of Your greatness and glory, and how it applies to us at this present time.

We pray for those who may be in difficulty. We pray for those who may be sick. We pray that You would encourage them and give them the confidence they should

have. 'We live, and we move, and we exist in You', as Paul told the Athenian philosophers in Acts 17:28. You are never far away from us, and we can never be away from You. And we need to know that, reckon that to be true, and live in light of it.

These days, Father, are times of anxiety. And yet they are an occasion for Your church to be a light. I pray that we will be that, that each one of us will be a light to those we come in contact with, and that we would show the confidence that we should have in the midst of difficulty. But we know some are going through difficulty and we pray for them; we pray for the sick and pray for those that are anxious. Lord, may we not be anxious. We pray that You would guide us and calm us and bless us. Pray that You would bless us now as we continue with this text of scripture and our study in it. We thank You for Christ. We thank You for all that we have in Him. And it's in His name we pray. Amen.

William Shakespeare wrote a play titled *All's Well that Ends Well*. It's not a Christian play, but the title applies to Christians universally, even when things seem not to end well. And often they don't. The Saints suffer the same afflictions as the world; rebellious children, financial setbacks, dementia, protracted difficult deaths, and unjust deaths when they suffer for the faith. The world has a cynical way of dealing with that kind of thing, with statements like, 'Life's not fair'. In other words, 'Don't be naïve. Get used to it'. And that's true. It's not fair. It's a fallen world we live in. Still, even when we know the nature of things, we are often troubled when bad things happen to good people—when God's saints suffer. We may wonder why and wonder where was God?

Some of those 7000 saints in Israel who had not bowed to Baal might have wondered that when Godly Naboth, one of them, was set up, falsely accused, and murdered, so that the king could have his plot of land. It's one of the most shocking stories in the Bible, and one that influenced Nathaniel Hawthorne's classic, *The House of the Seven Gables*, a novel about a land grab, and the curse on the guilty man's family. It is fiction and romance. 1 Kings 21 is not fiction or romance, it is history—and brutal history. But it gives more than a forewarning that 'life's not fair'. It also reveals that God

see—and judges. So king Ahab learned Proverbs 14. "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death," (vs12).

Though at the time, everything seemed right for Ahab to do as he pleased. Elijah had been missing from the story since fleeing Jezebel and meeting God on Mt. Horeb in chapter 19. In the meantime, life has gone on in Israel, and gone rather well for the royal couple. They have won a big victory over Ben-Hadad and the Syrian army in chapter 20. Jezebel's prophets had recovered from the calamity on Mt. Carmel and so Baal worship was still the state religion. Things were 'back to normal'. There was peace and prosperity in the land. The three-year drought was over and forgotten. It was time for life and a life of leisure.

So Ahab took up gardening. He was excited about his hobby. One day he was puttering around the palace and he noticed a vineyard next door and thought, that would be perfect for growing vegetables—and so convenient. So he decided to buy it, or make a trade for it. He contacted the owner, Naboth, and made an offer. "...Give me your vineyard that I may have it for a vegetable garden because it is close beside my house, and I will give you a better vineyard than it in its place; if you like, I will give you the price of it in money." '.

Naboth had no interesting in trading or selling his vineyard for any price. Verse 3, "But Nabob said to Ahab, 'The LORD forbid me that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.' " 'The Lord forbid', because the Law forbid such a sale. In Leviticus 25, verse 23 it is stated, "The land moreover, shall not be sold permanently..." That's the reason Naboth refused to sell the land. It wasn't because he had a preference for his vineyard, or because the vineyard was beautiful to him, or because of its productivity. There is nothing said of that.

Ahab wanted it because of its location. It was near to his palace and convenient for his use. It allowed him to expand his gardens. And because of that, he was glad to make Naboth a deal, and make a good deal. He offered him a better vineyard in its place. So Naboth likely stood to make a nice profit off the sale; or trade up for an even better vineyard. But he refused, not for personal reasons, but for spiritual reasons. This

was his God given inheritance, which he was required to protect and to pass on to the next generation, according to the Law. Selling it would violate God's command.

This is the reason for Naboth's resolute response, "The LORD forbid me that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers." Naboth was obedient. He faced the same kind of temptation that we all face, the temptation to improve our situation either financially or socially—but doing it by ignoring the clear instruction of Scripture or violating one's convictions.

Then for Naboth there was the danger of offending the king, a man of power. No one wants to do that. People want to please the powerful and not upset them. After all, it was a generous offer that Ahab had made. This is when it is very easy to rationalize things; when we stand to profit from a deal, or to please a person of influence. After all, we can always use a little more money and it never hurts to please the king. But it seems Naboth didn't give any thought to any of that. Temptation was there, but he wasn't fazed by it, because Naboth was more concerned about obedience to God than he was in any kind of personal gain. So he easily passed up the profit, even at the peril of offending the powerful, because Naboth was a righteous man.

Ahab was not used to dealing with a man like that, at least not since Elijah left. But it was a teachable moment. The lesson was there, and that lesson was very simply that there are things that are more important than things; than gardens, or money, or approval—and that is serving God and walking with the LORD. But Ahab was not teachable. Naboth's righteousness made no impression on him, at least no positive impression. It meant nothing to him. He only wanted that piece of land. This is an example of what Paul meant when he wrote in Colossians, chapter 3, verse 5, that 'greed is idolatry'. Ahab's garden was his idol; one of his many idols. And idolatry corrupts the soul. The 'god' that we have in our mind affects the way we think and the way we live. And an idol is false, and it's corrupting.

So Ahab went home, went to bed, and sulked. When his servants brought his meal, he turned his face to the wall and refused to eat. He was so unhappy. This was a grown man acting like a spoiled child. He was king of Israel; rich, and powerful. He

wasn't used to anyone dealing with him in this way—telling him 'no'. When it happened, he didn't know how to deal with disappointment. It's a dangerous thing for a person to get everything he or she wants in life. Ahab was unprepared for let downs in life. So he sulked.

This is what becomes of a man who lives only for the world, for the material, for the earthly, and starves himself of the spiritual, of God's Word, of the Scriptures. His soul dries up. He has no wisdom or maturity. So Solomon wrote, in Proverbs 1 of wisdom shouting in the street and in the square saying, "How long, O naïve ones will you love being simple minded?" (vs22). Wisdom invites young people to follow her and promises to pour out her spirit on them. But people love to follow their own desires. Ahab refused to follow wisdom and grew up to be a childish fool; and a very weak man.

But he was an Israelite and would have had some familiarity with the Law of Moses, which instructed the king, in Deuteronomy, chapter 17, in verse 20, not to lift himself up over 'his countrymen'. He was under the Law; the same as they were. Maybe, that restrained Ahab from acting like a tyrant and simply confiscating Naboth's property.

If so, his wife had no such scruples. When she learned that he was not eating, she became alarmed and went to check on him and asked him what was wrong. And so king Ahab sat up, wiped his eyes of its tears, and tells his sad, sad story. Verse 6, "...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 a vineyard in its place.' But he said, 'I will not give you my vineyard.' " "

Now if Jezebel had any sympathy for Ahab, it seems to evaporate. She says, "Do you now reign over Israel?" Meaning, 'Who is the king here, you or Naboth? Act like a king!' She was no Israelite. She had no interest in or respect for the book of Deuteronomy and the Law of God. She was a Phoenician princess. She knew how Phoenician rulers governed: As despots with absolute authority. They bent the will of the people to their own will and took what they wanted. Ahab, she thought, was being a weakling.

But she knew what to do, "Arise, eat bread, and let your heart be joyful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." And with that, she stepped into Ahab's shoes and played the part of the king and plotted murder. Verse 8, "So she wrote letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal and sent the letters to the elders and to the nobles who were living with Naboth in his city. Now she wrote in the letters saying, 'Proclaim a fast and seat Naboth at the head of the people; and seat two worthless men before him, and let them testify against him saying, 'You cursed God and the king.' Then take him out and stone him to death.' "

This was a cold and evil woman, a real pagan. She had absolutely no fear of God, and she felt completely safe and secure. Whatever happened on Mt. Carmel in chapter 18 was ancient history. She had scared away Yahweh's prophet. He was gone. The LORD was irrelevant. She was queen of Israel, and Baal was god. Besides, she had acted in secret. No one would know. She was confident she was safe. It was Jezebel's plan, but Ahab was complicit in it. He knew what was happening but didn't have the courage or the will or the desire to stop it. He allowed her to use his seal and send the letters.

So having enlisted her fellow conspirators, they carried out her scheme and wasted no time in doing it; which shows not only their moral corruption, but their fear of crossing the queen. She was not one to be crossed. And this only highlights the integrity and the godliness of Naboth. He was equally quick in refusing the king, when the king was violating God's Law. Naboth feared God, not man.

So they called a fast. The reason for it isn't given, but it was to prevent some catastrophe from occurring; maybe another great drought or a national crisis, like a war with the Syrians. That would be the purpose for the feast. The people humbled themselves before the Lord because they assumed someone had sinned, and that would be the cause of catastrophe: Sin and rebellion; the very thing Naboth would be accused of committing.

He was seated in front of everyone. "Then the two worthless men", (*literally 'sons of Belial'; this is what is in the original text, which means; "sons of worthlessness"*), "came in and sat in front of him." (vs13) —Two men the city leaders trusted to lie. And

true to plan, they accused Naboth of 'blaspheming God and the king'. And the significance of blaspheming the king is that the king is the representative of God. To blaspheme him is to blaspheme God. It had the appearance of being legal. Blasphemy was punishable by death, which required two or more witnesses. The two men lied. Naboth was convicted and the people stoned him. When Jezebel got the news, she triumphantly commanded Ahab to go get this vineyard. "Arise," she said. "Take possession of the vineyard...for Naboth is not alive, but dead." (vs15). What Jezebel didn't know is that when she tells Ahab to "Arise", God told Elijah to "Arise, go down to meet Ahab...he is in the vineyard of Naboth." (17). And God sent him off with a message for the king, a blood curdling message of doom for both him and Jezebel.

So, when Ahab went to the vineyard and began to walk among the vines and grapes and think of the garden that he would plant, suddenly, standing before him, was Elijah. It stopped Ahab cold. He had no thought of seeing the prophet again. He thought he was rid of him for good. And yet, there he was again, dressed in his hair coat and leather belt looking fierce.

Seeing him Ahab said, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" (vs20). His words betray a sense of guilt. He's been found, as though he had been in hiding, as though he were a fugitive and had been found because he had been 'found out'. And then Ahab was a fool again. We see that here, because he thought that he could commit this crime without being found out and brought to justice. God is omnipresent. He's omniscient. He is everywhere, and He knows everything. Proverbs 15, verse 3, "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, watching the evil and the good."; watching both Ahab and Jezebel, and watching Naboth.

Now Ahab didn't care about The Proverbs, as we know. He didn't care about wisdom. Proverbs, chapter 1, verse 7 says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction." That was Ahab. He despised the very thing he needed most, wisdom. And fundamental to wisdom and knowledge and the good life is the fear of the LORD. The basis of folly then is denying the LORD. That's Psalm 14:1, "The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." "

Now this is not only an indictment on atheism, 'theoretical atheism', the belief that there is no God, that the world is strictly material, there is no spiritual, there is no creator. But it is also an indictment on 'practical atheism', which is far more common. And what practical atheism is, is not denying the existence of God, but simply living and thinking as though there is no God. That was both Ahab and Jezebel. Two very religious people. But they gave no thought to God, the only God, the LORD God. They dismissed Him as irrelevant. His prophet was long gone. And besides, Jezebel thought, I'm doing everything in secret.

Now suddenly His prophet is back, staring down Ahab with what Alfred Edersheim called, "His burning eyes", and exposing Ahab's secret sins of murder and theft—this is what Elijah has done. Ahab says, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" To which Elijah answers, "I have found you." In other words, 'Yes, I am your enemy', "...because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the LORD." That accusation against Ahab is vivid and forceful: 'You have sold yourself to do evil.' This word is used of people selling themselves into slavery. It is a conscious, deliberate act. Ahab couldn't blame his wife like Adam did. He wasn't sold, he sold himself. He willingly put himself under evil's control. That's what the fool does. And in doing that he becomes a slave to sin. So in that incisive statement, Elijah pronounces Ahab guilty.

Then he pronounced sentence. Because he had sold himself to do evil, God said, in verse 19, 'dogs would lick up his blood.' In verse 21 he said, "Behold, I will bring evil upon you, and will utterly sweep you away, and will cut off from Ahab every male, both bond and free in Israel; and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nabat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, because of the provocation with which you have provoked *Me* to anger, and *because* you have made Israel sin. Of Jezebel also has the LORD spoken saying, 'The dogs will eat Jezebel in the district of Jezreel.' "

Jezebel met her end when she was thrown out of a window and hit the pavement like a watermelon. And the dogs ate her remains. C.F. Keil, the German commentator called it 'the most ignominious end'. And it was that. No one escapes

God's justice. And for Ahab it was completely deserved. The historian comments on him in verse 25 and verse 26 to say that he was the worst of all the 20 kings of Israel, "Surely there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the sight of the LORD, because Jezebel his wife incited him." Listen, young people, it matters who you marry. Ahab was influenced by his wife. Yet, Ahab was still guilty.

Surprisingly he responded to the words of the prophet, verse 27, "It came about when Ahab heard these words, that he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and fasted, and he lay in sackcloth and went about despondently." And God noticed Ahab's response, noticed his contrition, and he told Elijah. 'that because Ahab had humbled himself, he would delay the judgment.'

Now, that's the mercy of God. Ahab's response was right and good, as far as it went. It didn't go far enough. It was not repentance unto salvation, but it was genuine contrition, sorrow for sin, and certainly sorrow for the judgment pronounced. And the Lord answered with mercy, which shows again His character, that He is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth. Still, it was temporary. Justice delayed is not always justice denied. And Ahab met his end in the next chapter, in a clearly Divine way.

He went to war against the Syrians again, and to ensure his safety, he disguised himself as a common soldier, 'Corporal Ahab, reporting for duty'. But 1 Kings 22, verse 34 states, "Now a certain man drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel in a joint of the armor." It took him out of the battle, and he died that evening. Bad luck? No. That's the providence of God. An arrow shot at random from the human perspective was the providence of God, and its 'meeting its mark' in that one place, the joint of his armor, shows exactly that this was the work of the LORD God. And when they washed the chariot in Samaria, we read that, "...the dogs licked up his blood...", a prophecy fulfilled. We cannot hide from the LORD and we cannot thwart His will, "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, watching the evil and the good." (Pro 15:3). This is the great lesson of this passage. 'The Judge of all the earth sees, and He does rightly.' (Ps 96:13). He does righteously. He saw Jezebel and Ahab. He dealt with them.

But He also saw the good. He saw Naboth, a faithful man, a righteous man. So what happened? Why didn't God protect him? We might have understood it if Naboth had been an obstinate or hostile man towards Ahab, if he had treated the king with disrespect, but he didn't do any of that, he acted righteously. In fact, no doubt that is what galled Ahab and Jezebel; Naboth's obedience and denying him what he wanted for righteousness sake. It convicted and incensed them. But for that very reason, wouldn't we expect the LORD to intervene on Naboth's behalf? Instead Naboth was allowed to suffer injustice at the hand of Jezebel. He obeyed the Lord and trusted the Lord.

So, the question is asked, why didn't God rescue innocent Naboth, who was His faithful servant and child, and who was brought into danger by his faith and obedience? This is a question that Job had all through his grief and sickness. It is what philosophers and theologians wrestle with—the problem of evil. Why do bad things happen to good people? Why do God's people, why do good Christians get the plague, the Spanish flu, Coronavirus? We will only find the answer to that in the Bible. It is not because God is evil. He is not. It's not because God is helpless. He is not. He is the Almighty, all knowing God. He is righteous and Holy and good. He hates evil.

And that is where we begin: We must begin with the fear of the Lord. It is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom, and we think from that basis, and we apply things from that basis. And based on that, we walk by faith, trusting that His plan is perfect. And what may seem to contradict His will really doesn't. And what may appear foolish is really wise. In fact, we know from such passages as Romans 8:28, that He only allows the world to harm us and the devil to touch us if it is for our good and for His glory and the good of His church. We may not know how harm or setbacks are good for us, or why they happen, but we know, by faith, (and I underline that), we know by faith that they are ultimately for our good.

Maybe Naboth's martyrdom was used by God to open the eyes of Israelites to the evilness of Baalism, and to bring them to faith. As Tertullian said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." Ultimately, Scripture refers us to heaven and the world to come. That is where the answers will be given, when it is stated in the Book of

Revelation 21:4, 'God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.' Everything will be resolved, everything will be understood, ultimately. That's the hope we have, the confidence we can have. In the meantime, we are to be faithful to the Lord, as Naboth was. Trust the Lord, in spite of the circumstances. And know that He is good for His Word, always leading us in the right way and the best path.

He promises to be with us 'through fire and water' and bless our obedience at every step. But that does not mean that we won't have hardship. In fact, Jesus said, "In the world you have tribulation." (Jn 16:33). Told that to His disciples. He tells that to us, as well. Paul said the same in Acts 14:22. After being stoned and left for dead, he told the young believers in Lystra not to be surprised, 'Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.' What happened to Naboth is a reminder of this.

We should not be naïve about the promises of God and our life in this world. We are in a battle, a spiritual battle, an invisible war with evil men and spirits that hate righteousness. But again, God lets nothing touch us that will not be for our good. And He will bless us for our faith and obedience. He turns injustice, and what appears to be defeat, into victory.

And there is no greater proof of that than Christ and the Cross. Jesus, too, had an unfair trial. Like Naboth, He was accused of blasphemy. When He was brought before Pilate He was charged with treason, acting against the king. He had false witnesses, 'worthless men' who lied about Him. And He was put to death, even though He was innocent, the only truly innocent man to ever live, the only truly good man to ever live. When it happened, His disciples were completely defeated. They fled and they went into hiding.

But His death was actually His greatest victory. At the cross, Christ purchased His people and delivered them from the power and penalty of sin and the devil. It was the reason He came into this world in the first place. The cross, then, was His great victory. And the resurrection was the Father's proof that He had accepted His son's sacrifice for us. And it is the guarantee that we, too, will overcome the grave and rise to new life in the new and glorious world.

The bloody end of Naboth also has a glorious end. It's not given here in the chapter, but I share the opinion of F. W. Krummacher who wrote, "We may well be quite sure that it was with no discontent or complaint against Divine Providence that Naboth, just after he had closed his eyes upon this world, amid volleys of stones, opened them before the throne of God." I believe that. What did Shakespeare say? "All's well that ends well." And this is where it ends for all who have believed in Jesus Christ and rest in His sacrifice for them—Before the throne of God. In the end, we win.

But it will not end well for the unbeliever. Justice will come to all, just as it did to Ahab and Jezebel. He knows all. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, watching the evil and the good." And the evil must answer to the Judge of all the earth someday. That is Christ. When the apostle John saw Him on the Isle of Patmos, he said in Revelation 1, verse 14, "His eyes were like a flame of fire." No one wants to face those penetrating, all seeing, all knowing, flaming eyes of Justice, and the fires that follow.

But there is a way of escape. God has provided that for all who believe. It is the cross. It is faith in Christ and God's eternal Son, the second person of the Trinity, who became a real man in order to stand in our place under God's judgment. He took our penalty and bore our sins away. And everyone who joins himself or herself to Him through faith receives forgiveness and life everlasting. God is just. He is also merciful. Believe in His Son and be saved. May God help you to do that. If you have not, may God encourage you with the great truth that He 'sees', He 'knows', He 'acts', and He is acting on your behalf. And He will take care of each and every one of you who put your faith in Him. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank You for Your goodness to us. When we come to a passage like this, (which is not a pleasant passage; a passage of sin, treachery and judgment), it gives us a real look at reality, and the way things are for us, and the difficulties that we may face. But it also is a passage with the great truth that You are on Your throne and that You are faithful. You see all, You know all, and You act. And You act, in our behalf. While

things may be bad to the very end and may not end as well as we would hope them to, they do end well in eternity.

And so Father, we thank You that You are in control of our lives, that we 'live and move and we exist in You'. So encourage us, Father, and enable us, not to be fearful in these times, but to be bold and be lights in the midst of darkness. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(End of Audio)