



## **BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Elijah the Prophet

“Naboth’s Vineyard,” 1 Kings 21:1-20 – TRANSCRIPT

On behalf of the elders we would like to express to each one of you in Believer’s Chapel, appreciation and thanksgiving to God and to you for the unusually generous giving, and particularly to the building fund, throughout this Christmas season. I’m sure that Mr. Pryor will give you details shortly, but it was above and beyond our expectation. And we want you to know that we are a great way along towards that building which we have been looking forward to entering one of these days, hopefully this year.

For the scripture reading, 1 Kings chapter 21 and the first 20 verses. 1 Kings chapter 21 and the first 20 verses. This is the next to last of the series of messages on the Prophet Elijah. Next Sunday, the Lord willing, we will conclude with a study of Elijah’s translation and his future. So the subject will be the future of Elijah, next Sunday morning, Lord willing. Verse 1 of 1 Kings chapter 21.

Now, if you’ll remember, the Prophet Elijah had his great victory, and then one of his great defeats in the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter, when Jezebel was responsible for his fleeing. But it was through that experience that Elijah came to hear “the still, small voice.” And now we have not heard much of Elijah since. He anointed Elisha to be prophet in his stead. And it has been several years, and now we pick up the account of his life in chapter 21,

“And it came to pass after these things, that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard, which was in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab king of Samaria.”

Now just one word of historical background. It seems evident that Ahab and Jezebel were not at the moment living in Jezreel, but were living in Samaria about twenty or twenty-five miles away. But they had a hunting palace, or a summer palace in Jezreel, and so this is the palace to which our chapter refers. It belonged to the king, but he himself at the moment, was not living there.

“And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, ‘Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs (or a vegetable garden), because it is near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money.’ And Naboth said to Ahab, ‘The LORD forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee.’ And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread. But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said unto him, ‘Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread?’ And he said unto her, ‘Because I spake unto Naboth the Jezreelite, and said unto him, ‘Give me thy vineyard for money; or else, if it please thee, I will give thee another vineyard for it,’ and he answered, ‘I will not give thee my vineyard.’” And Jezebel his wife said unto him, ‘Dost thou not govern the kingdom of Israel? Arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.’ So she wrote letters in Ahab’s name, and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles that were in his city, dwelling with Naboth.”

You’ll notice there is a little stress in the text here upon the fact that the elders here were dwelling in the same city as Naboth. They should have treated him better, his own city folks. Verse 9,

“And she wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people: And set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And then carry him out, and stone him, that he may die.”

Now Jezebel’s a lovely character. [Laughter]

“And the men of his city, (notice that stress) even the elders and the nobles who were the inhabitants in his city, did as Jezebel had sent unto them, and as it was written in the letters which she had sent unto them. They proclaimed a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people. And there came in two men, children of Belial, and sat before him: and the men of Belial (as you know, Belial is a term for the devil, and so these are devilish men, men of the devil) witnessed against him, even against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, Naboth did blaspheme God and the king. Then they carried him forth out of the city, and stoned him with stones, that he died. Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, Naboth is stoned, and is dead. And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned, and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, ‘Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead’ (and Naboth’s property belongs to the crown, now). And it came to pass, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, ‘Arise, go down to meet Ahab King of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it. And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, ‘Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine.’ And Ahab said to Elijah, ‘Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?’ And he answered, ‘I have found thee, because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the LORD.’”

May God bless the ministry and reading of his word. Let’s bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the privilege which is before us. The privilege of opening the holy Scriptures and reading again the word of God. We’re thankful that these ancient Scriptures still speak in the power of the still, small voice of God.

And we pray that today, as we listen to the Scriptures, that our hearts may be open and responsive to the lessons that are contained within them. We know that they are written for our admonition, for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. And may, O God, may they have their powerful effect in our lives.

We thank Thee for the privilege of being here, for the privilege of living in this land, and for the blessings that have accrued to us from this privileged relationship and place that we have. We pray, O God, for each one present. We know, Lord, that there are many who are here with deep burdens and problems. And we pray, O God, that Thou wilt minister through the Scriptures, and may the problems and needs of our lives be met. And may our fellowship in the word strengthen us.

And may throughout this week, as we reflect again upon the fact that Jesus Christ is the living Lord, and Thou art the living God, that the power of the presence of God may go forth with us, in testimony and witness, and in spiritual fruit throughout this week. We pray, particularly for those who are having many opportunities to speak to

their friends and neighbors and fellow students about Jesus Christ. And we pray, O Lord, that this week may be a week of advance.

We pray for the whole church of Jesus Christ, and ask that Thou wilt strengthen each lowly member. And may, O God, the word be fruitful and profitable through us. May others, as they look at us, see something of him who loved us and gave himself for us. We pray for a deeper devotion to Thee, to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the word of God.

And Lord, we especially pray for this assembly of Christians, and ask that the Holy Spirit may guide and direct us. And may the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace be manifested in such a way that others may see Jesus Christ through us. And give us, Lord, an open door in the ministry of the word, throughout this community and in the uttermost parts of the world. We know, Lord, Thy hand is upon us, and may it be upon us for the glory of Thy name, through Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

[Message] The subject in our next to last study of the Prophet Elijah is Naboth’s vineyard. There are three types of characters in the story that we are looking at this morning. All three types are evil, and yet they are evil in different ways. Ahab is a wicked man and a weak man. Jezebel is a wicked woman, but a strong woman. The elders of Israel are wicked men – those who lived in Jezreel – but they are subservient men. Elijah is the man of power.

You can understand why in the New Testament, in the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke, it is stated that John the Baptist would be a man who should minister in the spirit and power of Elijah. He was a powerful man. And of course, he was a good man.

In this chapter, he was back on the scene after some years of spiritual school, or as some would like to say, in a “spiritual hospital.” For he has had his fall, and through his fall, he has come into contact with something which apparently he came into contact with for the first time: the still, small voice of God. And he learned a great lesson

through his fall, and that is that God often does not work by the sensational, miraculous signs, but he works most effectively by the still small voice in the human heart.

Now this chapter is one of the outstanding illustrations in the word of God of the evil of unscriptural alliances. For Ahab had made a tremendous mistake when he married Jezebel. Jezebel was from Sidon. She and her father and her family were worshippers of Baal. And consequently the marriage that Ahab contracted with this woman was illegal, from the standpoint of the word of God, and Ahab never recovered from it. In fact, in this very chapter, it is stated in the 25<sup>th</sup> verse, there was none like unto which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel, his wife, stirred up.

So in them we have the illustration of that New Testament principle which the Apostle Paul expounds for us in 2 Corinthians chapter 6 and verse 14: “Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? Ahab did not listen to the word of God, and he married this ungodly woman. She apparently must have been a very commanding and attractive woman in the flesh. But he made a tremendous mistake, and his life was wrecked by the alliance which he made. Jezebel, the ungodly, unprincipled daughter of Belial was Ahab’s evil genius, and she was that until his dying day.

Now in chapter 21 of the Book of 1 Kings, the first thing that comes before us is the crime of Ahab. As you read this chapter, you’re inclined to think it was really the crime of Jezebel. But from God’s standpoint, Ahab was responsible for what he allowed to come to pass. And so he tells Elijah later on the chapter, in the 19<sup>th</sup> verse, that when he is to meet Ahab, he is to say, ‘Hast thou killed and also taken possession?’” So while it was Jezebel who carried out the nefarious plot, it is Ahab who is responsible, because he is the man, and he is the King of Israel.

There are five tragic scenes, and they tell the cruel story of the murder of Naboth, a God-fearer, a man who was willing to say no to the supreme ruler in the land. Now this is a very graphic chapter. It’s full of pathos. It’s the sketch of a master. And of course, the master is ultimately the Holy Spirit who is responsible for it. But in this crime, which is described for us in these 16 verses I say, there are five tragic scenes.

Scene number one is the fruitless deal which Ahab tried to contract with Naboth the Jezreel. You can just imagine what happened. He’s out for the hunting season in his palace in Jezreel. It’s a lovely place. It’s a lovely place today. If you’re there, you can see all around the surrounding countryside. You can see the plain of Esdralen. It’s a beautiful sight. And there was just one thing that marred it so far as Ahab was concerned. There were a few little acres hard by his palace property which he wished. After all, every man wants to till the ground, and who doesn’t want to have a vegetable garden at his palace?

And so, Ahab wanted a vegetable garden, and that plot that Naboth had was just the place. And so you can sense what happened. He liked. He saw. He coveted it. He arranged a meeting with this man Naboth. And it was Naboth’s ancient property; it belonged to his family and had been in his family ever since the beginning. He arranged a little meeting, an appointment with the king, and he began to bargain with Naboth. He said, Naboth, I like your vineyard. I’d like to have a vegetable garden there. It’s near my house. And if you want, I’ll give you a better vineyard than this one, somewhere else, but if you don’t want another vineyard I’ll be glad to give you exactly what it’s worth.

Now this sounds very reasonable. In the United States it would be very reasonable, just as Lyndon were to call you up and say to you that he would like the little plot of ground which you have, and he’d like to bargain with you about it. He’d give you a better place, or he’ll give you what it’s worth.

But in Israel things were different. In Israel, the land did not belong to the people. The land belonged to God. Now that’s specifically stated in the Old Testament.

They possessed it, and they had their ancient patrimonies, and they were given explicit instructions that they were never to sell the land. Never. No Israelite was ever allowed to sell his land, unless he had to because he couldn’t pay his debts. And even then, the person was responsible to give it back to him when the year of jubilee came. Every 50 years, everybody got their property back. So it was against God’s word for Naboth to sell to King Ahab.

And so consequently, Ahab’s smooth words of bargaining were contrary to the law of God, which he, as the supreme ruler in the land was responsible for upholding. So what we have here is not an ordinary deal as we would say in Texas, but we have a high-handed interference with the rights of a simple citizen of God’s land. The property belonged to God. And so now, Ahab in this covetous caprice, desires the land, that little piece of nice land that belonged to one of his simple citizens. He had forgotten the real owner of the land.

Now at this point, I want to take off for just a moment and say a little bit about the king in Israel. A couple of years ago or so, Mr. Hodges came out here, and he spoke to us on Israel’s mistake in asking for a king. Now that was a very tragic mistake on Israel’s part. You see, Israel had been governed by God. They were a theocracy. God ruled in Israel, and that was his design for them. He wished that he might be their ruler always. But you’ll remember in the time of Saul and Samuel, the children of Israel came to Samuel and said, “Samuel, you’re getting old. The time’s coming when you’re not going to be here to judge us, and so make us a king to judge us like all the nations.” Samuel remonstrated with them. God had spoken to him. God had said to Samuel when they reject you, they are really rejecting me. And when they ask for a king, they are rejecting me. Nevertheless, the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel and they said, “Nay, but we will have a king over us, that we may be like all the nations.” And so, you can see the beginning of this insidious attitude that begins to infect the people of God: we must have favor with the people; we must have favor with the world. And this is one of



the most insidious attitudes that a child of God can ever fall prey to. We want to be like the people. We want to have a king like Ahab.

Now Samuel warned them. He said, now when you get a king, and you have rejected God from being your ruler, you’re going to discover that he’s going to do some things that you’re not going to like. Because any man is bound to be inferior to God as a ruler. So, I just want to pick one verse out of the many things God said would happen to them when they picked a king. It’s 1 Kings [sic., 1 Samuel] chapter 8 and verse 14, “And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your olive yards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants.” In other words, this is exactly what Samuel said through the word of God that kings would do: they would steal your vineyards. And so now we have the fulfillment of it, in Ahab who wants Naboth’s vineyard.

Now the next scene, after Naboth has made his history-making “no.” By the way, isn’t it wonderful you can live in a land in which you can tell the supreme ruler, “No!” It would be even better if you could get away with it. [Laughter] Now the scene, the second scene, is in the palace dining room.

Some think the second scene is in the palace bedroom. I’m inclined to think that because of the reference to food, that it may have been in the dining room. That’s inconsequential. Here is the conquering monarch of Israel. He gets in his chariot after he hears Naboth say no. He is very much upset. He had been thinking about those vegetables, and so now he makes his way back to the palace in Samaria. He’s upset. He’s displeased. He’s downhearted. He’s heavy. And so he rushes into the house, this conquering monarch of Israel, mind you – and in the preceding chapter it’s just spoken of a great military victory which Ahab had – this conquering monarch of Israel, weeping unroyal tears by the dining room table.

If you would have gone in that day, you would have walked up to Ahab and said, Ahab, who’s died? Is Jezebel gone? Hallelujah under your breath, you know [laughter]. Or, has your mother died? Ahab, have you lost a military victory? Did Ben-Hadad come

after all and overcome you? Has there been a tremendous earthquake or storm that has destroyed a great section of the land? Why it looks as if there must be death, disaster or defeat of some kind, when the monarch is weeping by the side of the table and won’t eat. “No,” Ahab would say, “I can’t have my vegetable garden.” Now, the king, mind you.

So, he sulks like a spoiled brat. And so, Jezebel comes in and says, what’s got into you, what’s with you? He said Naboth said no. He wouldn’t give me that vegetable garden. Jezebel says, who’s boss in Israel? Are you? “Dost thou not govern the kingdom of Israel? Arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry”—like Lady MacBeth: give me the dagger!” I’ll get it for you.

So, the next scene. It’s the queen’s drawing room. She’s busy writing. It’s villainous dictation. Scribes are standing by, and she’s giving the word. And she gives the word. And she takes Ahab’s seal, which she has managed to steal, I presume, or by this time she’s used to taking it. It may even be sitting on her dressing table. I don’t know by this time. At any rate, she seals it with the king’s official seal, and she sends the message.

And the message goes to the elders of the little village of Jezreel. That’s the place where Naboth dwelt. Now, of course, in this you see the very nest of sins. Ahab has broken the tenth commandment: thou shalt not covet. But Jezebel breaks several of the commandments: thou shalt not murder, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not covet. And what is even more terrible is that in the breaking of the law, she uses the word of God.

Now she, of course, is a daughter of Belial. She doesn’t believe in Jehovah. She doesn’t believe in Elijah. She doesn’t believe in the Scriptures. But she’s very wise. She’s very intelligent. She knows these people do. And she knows that they will be responsive to an appeal to Scripture. And so what better method than to use the very word which I despise, but which they respect, in order to gain the condemnation of one [indistinct] by

this law? For I think that Naboth was one of the 7,000 who hadn’t bowed the knee to Baal.

And so she arranges a nice note. She sends a note to them, and she writes in the letter, now the first thing you must do is proclaim a fast. Now do you know why you had fasts? Why you had fasts because you had national calamities. You had fasts because Israel has suffered a defeat, or Israel is in a spiritual decline. And so, now here is a religious fast. A spiritual decline has taken place because Naboth, the Jezreelite, has blasphemed God and the king. And so let’s have a fast. Let’s make it very legal. And so let’s have fast, and furthermore, I want you to select two men, sons of Belial – my kind of men – select them, and then let’s have a trial. Let’s set Naboth on the judgment seat. And let’s have these men come and let’s have them testify that Naboth has blasphemed God and the king.

Now it is specifically stated in the Book of Exodus that thou shalt not blaspheme the king. Thou shalt not blaspheme God nor the princes of thy people. And furthermore, if a man lost his property in this way, the property became the property of the crown. And so this is a perfectly legal means of gaining the property. Have him condemn, by lawful trial. And so that’s the third scene, the queen’s drawing room.

The fourth scene is the village assembly. And now they’re all gathered there; the people, the elders, Naboth. He’s wondering what in the world has happened. He’s thinking, God has left me. He’s thinking, I have put my trust in God, and he has let me down. He’s thinking other probably black thoughts, too, because he’s a human being. He’s wondering if after all his testimony had been worthwhile. It doesn’t really pay to stand up for God in days like these, he’s thinking.

And so he’s there, and he listens to this horrible trial. This reminds me of some of the heresy trials that have taken place in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, in which godly men were brought before ungodly tribunals according to the laws of the church and were let out of the Scriptures upon which these laws were based. But now, they’re out of harmony with

the leadership. And your mind goes back to the fundamentalist controversies of the 20s and the 30s, when some godly men were let out of membership of certain groups, because they stood for the Scriptures. But, by that time control was in the hands of liberal men who used the rightful means of the court trial of the church to eject them from the very fellowship for which they stood.

Reminds us, of course, of the Lord, who was read out of Israel, according to the laws of Israel, because he had blasphemed. So Naboth stands in a good tradition.

So these two wretched barlets stand up, and they condemn the man of God. He vainly protests, but nevertheless, they take him off. And they take him off to die.

I wonder what might have been thought by these men afterwards. Suppose afterwards these men had been seized by Elijah, and he had asked them, now, why did you do it? They would have probably said, we were only following orders. After all, Jezebel had given us strict orders, and we were just following orders.

You know, there is something you learn from this, and it’s a very important principle in the word of God. When you lose the fear of God, it leads to the craven fear of man. It’s the man who has no fear of God who fears man. And when a man really learns who God is, and decides that he is going to fear him, then he doesn’t man or even woman – a woman like Jezebel. But these men have lost the fear of God, and consequently they tremble before the skirt. Much better be a Naboth under the ground, a man who said no to the king, than to be one of these wretched men who accuse the man of God, and escape for their lives because they were following orders. Because, you see, there is a tribunal to come that is a far greater tribunal than this one.

Fifth scene. Meanwhile, back at the palace, word is back. We’ve done your job for you, Jezebel. So Jezebel exultantly comes in before Ahab, and makes the announcement. She said, Ahab, it’s yours. Naboth is not alive, he’s dead. And when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, he rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite to take possession of it.

Now as you look at these five scenes, it’s no wonder that we read in the New Testament that Jezebel stands as a term that is synonymous with unrepentant, idolatrous, seduction. And the one who speaks of Jezebel in the strongest terms is our Lord Jesus Christ himself. In the Book of Revelation, in the letters to the churches, and specifically in the letter to the church at Thyatira, in the 20<sup>th</sup> verse, Jesus said, “Notwithstanding, I have a few things against thee because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce my servants, to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication, and she repented not.” In other words, Jezebel has become a symbolic term for a woman who is guilty of unrepentant seduction and idolatry, from the lips of our Lord himself.

Well Ahab’s very happy. He’s just savoring that vegetable garden. And he makes his way in his chariot down to Jezreel. And you can just see him. He goes with a smile on his face. Everything is lovely this morning. After all, he’s going to have that plot of ground. He’s thinking about the seeds he’s going to plant. He’s thinking about what he’s going to eat, and how much fun he’s going to have, and furthermore, Elijah’s no longer here. After all, that prophet had troubled him for a little while, but he had fled. He turned coward. He went down into the desert. And so far as Ahab is concerned, at least the text seems to suggest, Elijah’s living like a hermit. And he doesn’t seem to be bothered with him anymore.

Nevertheless, his conscience bothers him, of course. He thinks about these things. He thinks about what’s happening, because, after all, Ahab was a man who could be touched. How deeply no one will ever know. He could be touched. Deep down in the recesses of his heart, he doesn’t really have any peace. But outwardly, things seem to be wonderful. And you know, it’s very easy to rationalize yourself. When you’re out of fellowship with God, if you can think about the good things—and don’t think about the other things, don’t think about that nagging sin. Don’t think about that thing which

you’ve done, because your peace will go if you do. Forget it. Forget it; let it lie low.

Think about other things. Think about things that outweigh that.

So now he goes. He’s going down to take possession of the vineyard. But as he goes for this toy, in this field of blood, this Aceldama – for that’s what this field has become, an Aceldama – he discovers that when he gets the field, he also gets Elijah. And he’s not happy about that at all.

You can see him as he pulls his chariot up, he jumps out of his chariot, and as he looks over the leafy vineyard of Naboth, he sees a shaggy-haired man walking around in it, walking out toward the front. And he looks, and he sees that all he has on is a mantle around his shoulders and a leather girdle about him, and all of the people in the world it’s Elijah! And so with his turnips, he gets the prophet. [Laughter] And he discovers that everything turns to squash. [More laughter]

Now Elijah, Elijah had had a word from God. And his word from God was this. I want you to go down to Ahab’s place there in Jezreel. I want you to go down where Naboth had that vineyard, and I want you to stand in there, and when Ahab comes, because he’s going to be in the vineyard, I want you to say, “Hast thou killed, and also taken possession?” And furthermore, after you’ve startled him with that, Elijah, I want you to say to him, “At the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine.” And I have some nice words for Jezebel, too.

Now Elijah is back to serving God. You remember the story of Samson? Samson was disobedient. He finally, in the lap of Delilah, revealed the secret of his consecration to God. And they brought out a royal barber and reduced him to a weak man.

But you know, the wicked are very intelligent, but they’re also at times very dumb. If I had been in Israel in that day, and if I had that man Samson to contend with – if I had been a Philistine – I would have said, now I want to assign a royal barber to Samson, and every morning I want you to cut his hair. Give him a crew cut, every morning. But they forgot. And you know, the text says that the hair of Samson began to grow again. And

with the growth of his hair came the growth of his consecration. And so in fact, Samson was never so wonderful as he was in that last mighty stand. And it’s because of that that he’s in the great roll call of faith in Hebrews chapter 11. Because finally, when his hair is grown and now he realizes that he must serve God and God alone, it’s through this final dedication that he wrecks the house of the Philistines and does his mighty deed.

And so Elijah. His hair has begun to grow. He went down and heard the still, small voice. And that still, small voice of God has stilled the voice of this prophet. And so now he’s not afraid of Ahab. He’s not afraid of Jezebel. And so he meets Ahab, and he gives him the message of God.

There’s an old adage, “the king can do no wrong,” but it’s wrong. The king was surprised by the prophet of fire. And notice his response. Ahab said to Elijah, “Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?” That doesn’t mean, hast thou found me out, but, hast thou found me and now I’m going to experience the vengeance that I know has been eating at my inward heart? Great principle here. Pleasure won by sin is peace lost. Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And the great King of Israel who has won the great victory and now has his plot of ground is trembling before the hairy prophet of the Lord.

You know we discover this about sin. It’s wonderful. It’s very enticing. You look at it, and you savor it, and finally the time comes when you commit the act. And the moment you commit the act, you loathe the thing that you have done. It seems to evaporate. The thing that was pleasant is now unpleasant. It’s like the night debauched, which brings, inevitably, the hangover of the next morning. It comes inevitably. You want to take a few drinks? I know. I remember. Let’s have a time. Let’s go out on the town. But the next morning that comes.

The Roman Army, it was said, went everywhere bringing solitude but not peace. You see what they did was conquer everything. And what they did was leave everything in a state of abject slavery. But that’s not peace. And so Ahab now has committed his wicked deed, and he stands now before God, and he discovers that there’s always an

Elijah waiting at the gate when we have sinned against God. For Elijah represents the conscience that God has implanted in our hearts. And you can be sure of this, when you disobey God, when you have sinned against God, when you have committed that act which seemed so lovely and pleasant to you, so enticing, you can always be sure there’ll be an Elijah standing at that gate, right afterwards, to speak to you.

“Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?” You’ll discover that sin is not only a crime, it’s a blunder. It’s not only a terrible thing, but it’s stupid! Stupid, because you know what’s going to happen. But you do it, because it’s so wonderful. And then soon, right afterwards, Elijah’s there. Conscience of God. So it’s not a crime; it’s a blunder. It’s a stupid thing. Like a man who divorces his wife. It’s stupid. It’s not only a mistake from the standpoint of God’s word, it’s stupid; now he has two wives to support. Stupid. I’m not a lawyer; I’m not going to give my lecture on this. Maybe someone needs it. Divorce is a crime and it’s a blunder. It’s a stupid mistake. That’s not very comforting to your wife if you don’t love her anymore, to know that the only reason you’re living with her is you don’t want to make that mistake, too. But it is a stupid mistake, nevertheless.

But notice, too, he says, “Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?” Sun blinds. You see, the only friend that Ahab had was Elijah. You see, everyone else was saying, yes, yeah, yes, yes, yes, yes, O king, yes, yes, yes. And there was one person who could say no. Naboth said it, then he couldn’t speak anymore. But Elijah says no. He’s the one friend that Ahab has. Jezebel’s not a friend. She’s his foe. She’s his mortal enemy. In fact, she’s the enemy of his soul.

But Ahab’s his friend. But now, a man in the grip of sin, looks at his only friend and says, hast thou found me, O mine enemy? That’s exactly the way we do. That’s exactly the way we do. The one friend we have is the word of God. The one friend we have is the Lord Jesus Christ. The one friend we have is God. But we turn against the word of God.



What does that preacher think he’s doing, preaching to me like that? What does God, that Bible, speak in it as it does? I don’t know if I can believe in it or not. So we react in that way. We call sweet, bitter. We call bitter, sweet, because sin blinds.

That’s why people speak about the gospel as being gloomy. You know when you preach the word of God, you always know people say, boy, he preaches a gloomy kind of message. Sin. Judgment. Conscience. Guilt. Condemnation. Hell. That’s gloomy. What we need is something light and loving and affectionate and devotional. No, that isn’t what you need. You need the word of God. And if it speaks like a sledgehammer, this is the one thing you need. This is your friend. This is the loving God in heaven who desires your best. And sometimes it’s necessary to club us over the head.

Now Elijah speaks again. He says, “I have found thee because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord. The remainder of the chapter, which gives the conclusion, describes the judgment which God said would come upon Ahab, which was filled to the letter. Later, Ahab is slain.

You know, it states later on that a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and he smote the King of Israel between the joints of the harness. It was an accident, according to men. That arrow just went unerringly and right between the pieces of armor, it just happened to hit. You believe that? I don’t believe that at all. It didn’t just happen. It was personally guided by God. There was an irony, if you had swatted at it, you couldn’t hit it.

G.K. Chesterton used to say about the sun, he says, “The sun doesn’t rise because the earth turns or anything like that. The sun rises because God says, ‘Get up!’” [Laughter] That’s why the sun rises. And that arrow just went unerringly for Ahab.

And he has some words for Jezebel, too. He said, Jezebel, the dogs are going to eat you in Jezreel. In Jezreel. I don’t know – I cannot prove this – but I wonder if that happened in Naboth’s vineyard. City’s spread out. Years later, Jehu remembers that when Jezebel’s body is eaten and there’s nothing left but the bones by those wild dogs of

the east, he said, “It’s the word of the Lord.” Jehu, son of Nemshi. Perhaps one of the men who drove Naboth down to the vineyard. He remembered it.

May I just very quickly point out some lessons from this story. They’re very simple. They’re very important.

True happiness consists in being, not having. Ahab, of all the people – the king – that little plot of ground, that little vegetable garden—unhappy because he couldn’t have that. All the territories he had. All of the lands, all of the money, all of the property, all of the influence, all of the power – and that one little piece of land made him sick. You know, when you begin to covet, and you covet, and you covet, and you covet, it’s a disease. Happiness does not consist in having. A man’s happiness does not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses. A man’s happiness consists in his possession of God, and his satisfaction with God.

So many Christians today, they are running around for means, for influence, for power, thinking perhaps that if they can get this, and this—that lovely home, that swimming pool, that second home, that third car, those servants, and so forth and so on and so on. There’s nothing wrong with any of these things. I’d like to have a home with a swimming pool. I’d like to have three cars. I’d like to have a hunting lodge. I’d like to have a summer home and a winter home, a European home on the Riviera [laughter]. Nothing wrong with these things. Except, you know, you have that, and you want something else, and you want something else, or something else. True happiness consists in being, not having.

The blessedness of the persecuted. Naboth lost his life, but Naboth’s name is blessed, although he was chased into heaven by wicked Ahab.

The evil of unscriptural alliances, social, commercial, nuptial, ecclesiastical – any kind of alliance that prevents us from giving God first place is the wrong kind of alliance.

Knowers of truth are more dangerous to believers than ignorers of truth often. Jezebel was the more dangerous because she knew something about the word of God, and that’s how she could arrange Naboth’s murder.

The expensiveness of sin. He answered, “I have found thee because thou has sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord.” Jezebel was just the first payment for Ahab. There were many more after that.

When you go out to drink, it’s not just money that you lose. When you go out to covet, it’s not just self-respect that you lose. And so on down the line, it’s finally and ultimately a matter of a man’s soul. Thou has sold thyself, Ahab. It’s not your property, it’s not your self-respect. It’s yourself, your soul. O the expensiveness of sin and the certainty of retribution. I have seen. I will requite, God said. This is a voice from Naboth’s vineyard, too. Naboth may die, but God’s still living.

The consequences of sin are such that it’s an amazing thing that men ever get involved in sin. Ahab’s sin was sevenfold. First of all, divided Israel over his God. He married this wicked woman. He engaged in idolatry. He fell into impurity. He persecuted the prophets of God. He finally released those who had been persecuting, King Ben-Hadad. And finally, he was guilty of murder. And all when he knew the consequences of the breaking of God’s law. It’s a terrible thing.

It’s something you know, if you’re sitting in this audience this morning, and you have never yet believed in Jesus Christ, and you have been living a life of separation from God, and it has been one rejection of God after another, you have no peace. There may be solitude, but there’s no peace. It’s not that positive sense of a relationship with God. You may have been covering over those sins. You may have been trying to rationalize them. You may have been trying to forget them. But the time is coming, when you must stand before the Great White Throne of Judgment. And then, as worse than Elijah shall stand there, and there’ll be no time for a mending of ways. Because then it’s too late. And then the pain, and the sorrow, and the lack of the sense of peace, the disharmony,

the fear, the sense of guilt – all of these things that exist in your heart now, they are loving touches from a God in heaven to cause you to turn from the way! To turn from the way and stop that, and turn back to the word of God!

I’m so glad this chapter ends on a note of grace, even Ahab. When Ahab read these words, I think his repentance was incomplete. In the next chapter, he’s talking about prophets he doesn’t like because they prophesy evil and not good about him. But nevertheless, for a few days he humbled himself. And he went about that palace and he spoke softly. And God said, I’ve seen what’s happened to Ahab, and so I’m not going to execute the judgment on him, but on his family.

It’s wonderful to know that these senses of fear, and sense of guilt, this sense of lack of peace, this disharmony, this frustration that comes because we are out of touch with God is God’s way of saying, I love you, won’t you come back to me? Won’t you look at Jesus Christ who loves you and gave himself for you? Won’t you see that he has died for all of this sin, and you shall have a free and full forgiveness if you will come and say, I thank Thee, Lord, for Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast given.”

Isn’t that a wonderful, good news? That’s not a gloomy gospel. That’s a wonderful gospel. But the words of gloom have to come in order to [make us] remember the need that we have. And so I appeal to you this morning, if you have never put your trust in Christ, a loving God is waiting to forgive you right at this moment. Complete and final forgiveness. Won’t you put your trust in him? Don’t you want to be a Christian? Don’t you want that sense of peace? Don’t you want to have the past, present and future wiped out so far as guilt is concerned before God? You can have it right this moment. Just say, thank you, Lord, for Jesus Christ.

If you’re a Christian, and you’re out of fellowship with God, you’ve been under the burden of this sense of guilt, and that’s been pressure that has been bearing down upon you, confess your sin. Acknowledge your sin. Immediate forgiveness. Instant forgiveness.

Felix trembled, but he didn’t tremble enough. Agrippa was almost persuaded, but not completely persuaded. May God help you to be completely persuaded. May we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Now may the grace of loving God who inflicts pain and sorrow and a sense of guilt restore the small voice of the Holy Spirit, the presence of the risen Lord, be and abide with all who know him in sincerity.

And O Father, if there still be someone here who has not yet believed in Christ, O give them no rest nor peace in Thy love until they turn to Thee.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.