

ELIJAH PT.7 7-11-10

The King and Queen of Evil

(I Kings 21) Today we enter into a drama featuring four characters. There is the king of Israel. His name is Ahab. His wife, the queen, was named Jezebel. The hero of our story is Elijah, the prophet, who had stared down and beaten the prophets of Baal at Mt. Carmel, but who also had recently been pulled out of his depression by the grace of God. Today's story continues the conflict between the wimpy king Ahab, Jezebel, his wicked wife, and the mighty man of God. But it also involves a fourth character named Naboth. If you ever watched much Star Trek you probably figured out that when the story line involved a member of the crew who was not one of the regular stars, odds were good that this crew member would not survive the show. The Borg would get him. Naboth is sort of like that crew member. 21:1 *Now 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. Apparently Ahab had a summer palace in Jezreel in addition to the main one in Samaria. 2-3 Ahab 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."* 3 *But Naboth said to Ahab, "The LORD forbid me that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers."* Now you need to understand what Naboth is thinking here. His remark appeals to God and implies that it would be sin for him to relinquish the land inherited from his fathers. Naboth's reason for denying the request of his king is not selfish but moral. His conscience forbids it and for a very good reason. Because the land of Canaan was a special land given by God to the nation of the Hebrews, God had forbidden that anyone permanently sell the land of their inheritance. Numbers 36:7 *no inheritance of the sons of Israel shall be transferred from tribe to tribe, for the sons of Israel shall each hold to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers.* More is said of this in Leviticus 25 and in Ezekiel 46:18 *the prince shall not take from the people's inheritance, thrusting them out of their possession, he shall give his sons inheritance from his own possession so that My people shall not be scattered, anyone from his possession.* So, the refusal of Naboth was rooted in his moral and biblical convictions. Here was apparently one of those few righteous men left in Israel.

4 *So 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.* Does your five year old ever act like this? This is what we, in the business, call *immaturity*. One major element of maturity is the

development of a sense of relative weight or importance. We learn what is worth crying over and what is not. Little kids cry over not getting their favorite seat in the car or not getting the best colors to draw with - but over time most people get over that. Most people. For some, the toys may change but the pouting is still the same. So, we find the monarch of Israel running into his room, throwing himself on his bed and proceeding to mount a major pout because he didn't get his vineyard. Now, for the many peasants in Israel, how would this have looked? Unbelievably silly and selfish. But here is an important thing to note. Contentment is never found in what you have; it is found in who you are. Did you get that? (R) The apostle Paul wrote a letter from prison and said, "I have learned the secret of contentment regardless of circumstances." Paul was content in a jail cell; Ahab was a pouting fool in a palace. Ahab had bought the lie that the one who dies with the most toys wins. Remember the old Rockefeller quote and what he said when asked how much money was enough - he replied, "just a little bit more." Now don't make too little of this because I want you to understand that discontentment is the root of sin. (R) Adam and Eve were in the perfect garden, enjoying fellowship with God, and all the fruits of the garden were theirs except for that one tree. Satan's first tactic was to make Eve take her eyes off all she had and covet that one tree. Coveting - how does coveting differ from wanting? I mean, its okay to want something isn't it? There was nothing wrong with Ahab wanting that vineyard or even asking for that vineyard, but his reaction to disappointment showed his desire was excessive, that he sinfully coveted it and felt it to be critical for his happiness. That is coveting. The opposite is to be content with what you have which is what God urges us to be. A sociologist from a big university went to do a study on farm life in rural America and he moved in for a time with an older farm couple who had very little of this world's riches. On his first night there his hostess said to him, "Now if there is anything you need just let us know and we'll teach you how to get along without it." When you know contentment within you can learn to do without and be happy. Ahab knew nothing of that.

5-7 *But 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?" 6 So 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.'"* 7 *Jezebel 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."* At this point you can be sure that Ahab suspected his wife would do something heinous and unjust but he was able to live with that. He had too much conscience to do it

himself but not so much that he wouldn't be willing to profit from his wife's evil deeds. **8-10** *So 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. 9 Now she wrote in the letters, saying, "Proclaim a fast and seat Naboth at the head of the people; 10 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."* Isn't that a clever plan? And a sweet one at that. The idea of the fast is to imply that some judgment of God was imminent should they fail to rid the city of certain influences. Jezebel put a religious slant on this treachery. **11-14** *So 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. 12 They proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth at the head of the people. 13 Then 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. 14 Then they sent word to Jezebel, saying, "Naboth has been stoned and is dead."* The elders and nobles of the city - what a sorry lot they were! This story shows you what an awful state of immorality the nation had descended to. Here the leaders of the city were a set of wicked and wimpy men who feared the king more than God. **15,16** *When 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." 16 When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab arose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.* Tell me, how does that story make you feel? If you are alive to what you read I expect you respond with a sense of revulsion to such a cruelty and such a crass abuse of power. I expect that you feel indignant and outraged over this. I hope you do. I hope your sense of justice is highly offended by a story like this. There is something planted within every creature made in God's image that gets our adrenalin going when we encounter such injustice. This is the stuff of which movie plots are made because we have a passion for justice and revenge. When we see this kind of thing we are outraged! And I want you to think about why. I want you to consider the implications of your righteous indignation. From so many quarters these days we are hearing that there are no absolute moral rules, that the rules may change from time to time and culture to culture, and place to place. Seemingly intelligent people will actually say this in spite of the overwhelming evidence to the contrary and the evidence that they themselves don't believe it. If we deny moral absolutes then we

have no basis to oppose what Jezebel did. After all, by her standards, by her chosen values, might may very well make right and who are you to say otherwise? Anytime you say that something is *wrong* you affirm that there is a universal moral code. Whenever you suggest that something was unfair you affirm the existence of certain rules of justice. You may even ask, "how can there be a God when such awful injustice is allowed to happen?" But in the very act of questioning God's existence you affirm that which requires His existence. C.S. Lewis writes this about the days when he was a skeptic:

My argument against God was that the universe seemed cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of "just" and "unjust?" A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust? If the whole show was bad and senseless from A to Z, so to speak, why did I, who was supposed to be part of the show, find myself in such violent reaction against it? A man feels wet when he falls into water, because man is not a water animal: a fish would not feel wet. Of course, I could have given up my idea of justice by saying it was nothing but a private idea of my own. But if I did that, then my argument against God collapsed too – for the argument depended on saying that the world was really unjust, not simply that it did not happen to please my private fancies. Thus, in the very act of trying to prove that God did not exist – in other words, that the whole of reality was senseless- I found I was forced to assume that one part of reality—namely my idea of justice—was full of sense. (Joyful Christian p.7)

Anytime you express moral disapproval of a particular act you reveal your belief in a God of moral order and justice whose universal law has been violated. Your moral outrage is a testimony to the existence of ultimate meaning, ethical absolutes, and a God whose law is sewn into the fabric of our souls.

Now that my philosophical discourse is over, let's move on in our story. We've got more story.

17-20a *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 down to take possession of it. 19 "You 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?" Now there's a clever comeback huh? Ahab is shaken in the presence of Elijah. His conscience has him so shaken he can't

think. He is a pitiful character. Any man is pitiful who has made the servants of God, the messengers of truth, his enemies. **20-24** *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 Nebat, 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.' 24 *"The one belonging to Ahab, who dies in the city, the dogs will eat, and the one who dies in the field the birds of heaven will eat."* Thus end the words of Elijah. When I read this I remembered a passage out of Melville's Moby Dick. You may recall from that story that the whaling ship which was sunk by the great white whale was captained by a man named what? Ahab. Captain Ahab. And before the ship was to sail on its fateful voyage, there appeared at the dock a crusty old man who warned the sailors of Ahab's doom, and the old man was named *Elijah*. Here, the real Elijah pronounces God's judgment on the real Ahab. Then the writer of I Kings goes on to add **25** *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.* There are two major lessons from this story I want to bring out and apply for us. The first is this: Be careful whom you marry. (R) Ahab did evil but he was incited to it, encouraged in it, essentially carried along into it by his wicked wife. And is this the only time in history such a thing has ever occurred? Not on your life. You can read the same thing about Solomon. Solomon was not dominated by his wives like Ahab but he was certainly powerfully influenced. Be careful who you marry. Your choice will greatly affect what you become. I Corinthians 15: **33** *Do not be deceived. Bad company corrupts good morals.* And if that is true of friends it is more true of husband and wife. Because of what Ahab did his blood will become drink for the dogs but his first major mistake was in dating and marriage. First comes love, then comes marriage, then come the stones knocking the life out of Naboth. Then comes the wrath of God on Ahab and his family. Go back to where it started. What do you suppose attracted Ahab to Jezebel? (pause) Well, he was a weak man who admired her courage and aggressiveness and she was probably a pretty hot-looking babe don't you think? So, he ignored the word of God; he ignored the lessons of history and married this pagan woman who dominated his life. Now, granted, Ahab was a classic hen-pecked husband. Here was a man overshadowed in every way by his wife. Ahab is the patron saint of wimpy husbands. But whether you are hen-pecked or not you will be greatly affected by your spouse. Paul said in I Corinthians 7 that a married man is concerned with how to please his wife, the wife with how to please her husband. You will feel pressure to do what makes your spouse happy whether that is good or bad. And not only will you want to please your

spouse you will also become like your spouse. A few months ago my wife cracked a very witty, funny joke and I realized I was finally making an impression. She was becoming like me, for better or worse. Now that is going to happen and should greatly inform how you choose to marry. It should also speak to you who are already married. Jezebel incited her husband to do evil. How you are inciting your husband, your wife? You have the potential to contribute enormously to the sanctification of your spouse - or to his/her corruption. Which is it? I praise God that my wife, more than anyone I know, incites me to godliness. I urge you to do the same in your marriage.

Be careful who you marry because that person will greatly affect you, and for one other reason: that person will greatly affect your children. Unless we are utter degenerates we all have a deep affection for our kids. We love them so much and to me one of the most pitiful situations I run into is a parent despairing over their kids because in spite of one's efforts to lead the kids toward God the other parent is dragging them to hell. That's what Jezebel did for her kids. Her sin led to their eternal and temporal doom. Elijah said in verse 21 that God's judgments will include Ahab's children. And in fact, we read in II Kings 10 of how Jehu killed all 70 of Ahab's sons and piled their heads in a basket. Be careful who you marry - that woman will be your child's mother, that man will be your child's father. You dads and would-be dads, listen. The first two things you can ever do for your child are: #1 make yourself into a man worthy of imitation. And #2 marry a woman who can be a godly mother. You do that and you have given your kids an invaluable gift. You fail on #2 and you can count on many years of grief. I see so many problems traced back to this one bad decision. A son asked his father, "Dad, how much does it cost to get married?" The man replied, "I don't know, I'm still paying for it." You young people, and singles listen, there is a way to keep your marriage costs to a minimum. You don't go looking for somebody who suits your tastes. You hear folks always talking about tastes in women, or tastes in men as if that directs what we look for. But there is a lot of sweet-tasting poison out there. Here is what you do, if you want to get married you look for a quality man, a quality woman, and you let God's word define what quality is. God's word not some magazine, God's word, not immature peers, God's word, not some awful sitcom called "Friends." God's word defines what quality really means.

That's our first major lesson. Be careful who you marry. Lesson two is that there is a payday someday. (R) I use that language because one of the most famous sermons in American preaching was based on this text and called by that name. "Payday Someday" was a sermon preached by R.G. Lee, a Baptist pastor from Memphis well over 1000 times. RG Lee used the story of Ahab and

Jezebel to illustrate his point that although you may get away with sin for a time there is coming a payday someday when you will reap what you have sown. Ahab and Jezebel had their day in the sun but Elijah reminded them of that day that was coming that would even the score. The sense of justice inherent in our humanness teaches us that justice will be done and so does the Bible, but it notes as well that in a fallen world justice is often, in fact, usually delayed. And because justice is delayed and sinners are very short-sighted the fear of retribution is often absent. Proud sinners begin to think that they will get away with their wicked deeds. Ecclesiastes 8:11 *Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil.* And that is the situation in our world isn't it? God promises a payday someday but that someday may seem a long way off. But although it may be slow in coming, there is nothing more sure than this: payday is coming. It hasn't happened as yet for Osama. But judgment day will arrive. Ecclesiastes 12:14 *For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.* Justice may be slow but it is sure. Faith understands and reckons with that. Unbelief argues that a delayed justice is a non-existent justice. Men think that they are able to get away with evil. That's what Ahab thought didn't he? He went riding up to claim Naboth's vineyard thinking he was the luckiest fella. He thought he had it made in the shade. He thought he and Jezebel had gotten away with their crime. And he was in for a big surprise. Jay Trachman tells of a couple of young bucks who were driving a tall truck down a country road when they came to a bridge where a sign said, "CLEARANCE: 10 feet, 2 inches." The fellas stop, take out a tape measure and discover the truck is 10 ft. 8 inches. One says to the other, "I don't see no cops around. Let's go for it." They thought they were going to get away with it and they were fools. So is anyone who pretends that they will get away with sin. So is the man who forgets about the Payday Someday.

Elijah met Ahab in all of his exulting over his new acquisition and said, "Surprise (RR)" He pronounces the elimination of Ahab, his wife and his dynasty. And believe it or not - it all happened as God said. First to go was Ahab himself. Look at I Kings 22:34. The king was in battle against the Syrians when lo and behold 34,35 *a certain man drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel in a joint of the armor. So he said to the driver of his chariot, "Turn around and take me out of the fight; for I am severely wounded."* 35 *The battle raged that day, and the king was propped up in his chariot in front of the Arameans, and died at evening, and the blood from the wound ran into the bottom of the chariot.* Now they make a point of what happened to his blood

for a good reason. **38** *They washed the chariot by the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood ...according to the word of the LORD which He spoke.* In the next chapter Ahab's son Ahaziah dies as a result of a disease sent upon him for his idolatry. His brother Joram, another son of Ahab becomes king. In II Kings 9 we read of Joram's fate. God had told Elijah that he would raise up a man named Jehu to afflict the house of Ahab. II Kings 9:**21-26**

Then Joram said, "Get ready." And they made his chariot ready. Joram king of Israel and Ahaziah king of Judah went out, each in his chariot, and they went out to meet Jehu and found him in the property of Naboth the Jezreelite. 22 When Joram saw Jehu, he said, "Is it peace, Jehu?" And he answered, "What peace, so long as the harlotries of your mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?" 23 So Joram reined about and fled and said to Ahaziah, "There is treachery, O Ahaziah!" 24 And Jehu drew his bow with his full strength and shot Joram between his arms; and the arrow went through his heart and he sank in his chariot. 25 Then Jehu said to Bidkar his officer, "Take him up and cast him into the property of the field of Naboth the Jezreelite, for I remember when you and I were riding together after Ahab his father, that the LORD laid this oracle against him: 26 'Surely I have seen yesterday the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons,' says the LORD, 'and I will repay you in this property,' says the LORD. Now then, take and cast him into the property, according to the word of the LORD."

Ahab, Ahaziah, Joram are all dead according to God's word thru Elijah but there is still someone left isn't there? Everyone's favorite queen is about to meet Payday. **30-37**

When Jehu came to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it, and she painted her eyes and adorned her head and looked out the window. 31 As Jehu entered the gate, she said, "Is it well, Zimri, your master's murderer?" 32 Then he lifted up his face to the window and said, "Who is on my side? Who?" And two or three officials looked down at him. 33 He said, "Throw her down." So they threw her down, and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall and on the horses, and he trampled her under foot. 34 When he came in, he ate and drank; and he said, "See now to this cursed woman and bury her, for she is a king's daughter." 35 They went to bury her, but they found nothing more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands. 36 Therefore they returned and told him. And he said, "This is the word of the LORD, which He spoke by His servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 'In the property of Jezreel the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel; 37 and the corpse of Jezebel will be as dung on the face of the field in the property of Jezreel, so they cannot say, "This is Jezebel."'"

For those of you prone to think God makes idle threats, read the book. Read the book. And see what God says about the eternal fate of the unrepentant. God doesn't play games. He keeps his word. By the way, Jehu wasn't done with Ahab's family. Ahab had 70 sons thru many different women and Jehu rounded them all up, slaughtered them and put their heads in baskets. Thus was fulfilled Elijah's word in 21:**21,22** *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 Nebat, 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. Ahab thought he was getting away with his sin. How about you?

This story may be one to put fear in your soul. It may also be one that gives order to your world. Payday someday answers to our moral outrage. When we encounter serious evil we long for a day of wrath and vengeance. You know, so many of our movies have justice and vengeance as a chief theme. But have you ever seen a movie where the bad guy gets away or even wins? Nobody likes those movies. They make us uncomfortable and irritated. There is a principle of justice within us that finds its support only in a personal God who will bring every deed to judgment.

So, as we wrap up I want you to ask this question - if there is a payday someday for proud sinners what will be paid? What will be the price of such sin? There are lots of good answers to that. Death is one, hell is one. But my answer for today is that the price is one's soul. Notice the language about Ahab in our story. 20c *you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the LORD* He says to Ahab, you have sold yourself, or sold your soul. 25a *Surely there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the sight of the LORD.* The language here is that of a transaction. Ahab sold something, namely himself or his soul. He became thru this deal a slave of sin and Satan. That is a high price to pay so he must have gotten something very precious out of it don't you think? You be the judge - what did he get? He got a nice-looking wife; he got a new vineyard. Ahab sold his soul for what? A bad woman and some real estate! Think about that. Think of how many are making those same kinds of deals every day - and the price is their own souls! Granted now, you may get nice things for the price of your soul. Satan has access to some pleasant temporal goodies. No denying that. But you had better remember what Jesus said. Jesus said, "*What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?*" Such a man is a fool because he has lost the only thing that will count for eternity. Think about it. All you will take to judgment and beyond is yourself so you make sure that you never trade away your integrity, never trade away your spiritual heritage, never trade away your soul for a vineyard or a woman or a man or a job or some booze, or some pot or a house. You sell yourself to do evil and you will face an enormous payday - someday. You think about it and let's pray.

As you go to prayer I want to remind you of some good news about Payday Someday. It is possible to escape it. One day 18 years ago I sent my 3 yr old to her bedroom for a spanking, but her big sister, feeling merciful offered to take her spanking for her and that is exactly what Scripture says Jesus did for everyone who trusts in Him. He paid the price for our sin. He took our punishment. For all who repent and make Jesus their Savior and Lord, payday has already

happened – 2000 years ago at Calvary. Jesus paid it all. For those who reject the grace of God payday still awaits – the choice is yours.

Father, we see afresh how terrible is your wrath on proud sinners. Give us to fear your hand of justice and so run to your arms of mercy. We thank You for Jesus, our refuge and hope. Fill with saving faith those among us who know Him not and teach us all to value our eternal souls above any of Satan's prizes. Come now and shower saving mercies in this place for Jesus sake we ask.