

Sunday 6th November 22

Being clear about God's Justice

1 Kings 21:1-29

Naboth's Vineyard

21 Some time later there was an incident involving a vineyard belonging to Naboth the Jezreelite. The vineyard was in Jezreel, close to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. **2** Ahab said to Naboth, "Let me have your vineyard to use for a vegetable garden, since it is close to my palace. In exchange I will give you a better vineyard or, if you prefer, I will pay you whatever it is worth."

3 But Naboth replied, "The LORD forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my ancestors."

4 So Ahab went home, sullen and angry because Naboth the Jezreelite had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my ancestors." He lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat.

5 His wife Jezebel came in and asked him, "Why are you so sullen? Why won't you eat?"

6 He answered her, "Because I said to Naboth the Jezreelite, 'Sell me your vineyard; or if you prefer, I will give you another vineyard in its place.' But he said, 'I will not give you, my vineyard.'"

7 Jezebel his wife said, "Is this how you act as king over Israel? Get up and eat! Cheer up. I'll get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."

8 So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, placed his seal on them, and sent them to the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth's city with him. **9** In those letters she wrote:

"Proclaim a day of fasting and seat Naboth in a prominent place among the people. **10** But seat two scoundrels opposite him and have them bring charges that he has cursed both God and the king. Then take him out and stone him to death."

11 So the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth's city did as Jezebel directed in the letters; she had written to them. **12** They proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth in a prominent place among the people. **13** Then two scoundrels came and sat opposite

him and brought charges against Naboth before the people, saying, "Naboth has cursed both God and the king." So, they took him outside the city and stoned him to death. ¹⁴ Then they sent word to Jezebel: "Naboth has been stoned to death."

¹⁵ As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned to death, she said to Ahab, "Get up and take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite that he refused to sell you. He is no longer alive, but dead." ¹⁶ When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, he got up and went down to take possession of Naboth's vineyard.

¹⁷ Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite: ¹⁸ "Go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who rules in Samaria. He is now in Naboth's vineyard, where he has gone to take possession of it. ¹⁹ Say to him, 'This is what the LORD says: Have you not murdered a man and seized his property?' Then say to him, 'This is what the LORD says: In the place where dogs licked up Naboth's blood, dogs will lick up your blood—yes, yours!'"

²⁰ Ahab said to Elijah, "So you have found me, my enemy!"

"I have found you," he answered, "because you have sold yourself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD. ²¹ He says, 'I am going to bring disaster on you. I will wipe out your descendants and cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel—slave or free. ²² I will make your house like that of Jeroboam son of Nebat and that of Baasha son of Ahijah, because you have aroused my anger and have caused Israel to sin.'

²³ "And also concerning Jezebel the LORD says: 'Dogs will devour Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.'

²⁴ "Dogs will eat those belonging to Ahab who die in the city, and the birds will feed on those who die in the country."

²⁵ (There was never anyone like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, urged on by Jezebel his wife. ²⁶ He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols, like the Amorites the LORD drove out before Israel.)

²⁷ When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted. He lay in sackcloth and went around meekly.

²⁸ Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite: ²⁹ “Have you noticed how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself, I will not bring this disaster in his day, but I will bring it on his house in the days of his son.”

2 Thessalonians 1:1-10

1 Paul, Silas and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

² Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thanksgiving and Prayer

³ We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing. ⁴ Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.

⁵ All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. ⁶ God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you ⁷ and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. ⁸ He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might ¹⁰ on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marvelled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

Sermon: Being Clear about God’s Justice

[It would be good to have your Bibles opened at 1 Kings chapter 21 – let me pray before we begin]

Intro/Context

We're living a world which is **unfair** and **unjust**. Especially for God's people

Each year the **Open Doors** organization [[explain who they are](#)] bring out the **World Watch List** – it tells us the **top 50 most dangerous countries to be a Christian**

[Slide 1-WWL]



The **most dangerous place** in the world to be a Christian is **Afghanistan** – population 39 million – Christian's thousands – main religion is Islam

It is impossible to live openly as a Christian in Afghanistan.

The Taliban ensure that Islamic rules and customs are implemented and kept. Christian converts don't have any option but to obey them. If a Christian's new faith is discovered, their family, clan or tribe has to save its honour by disowning the believer, or even killing them. This is widely considered to be justice. Alternatively, since leaving Islam is considered a sign of insanity, a Christian who has converted from Islam may be forcibly sent to a psychiatric hospital.

2nd is North Korea – population 26 million - **400,000 Christians – main religion – Agnostic [existence of God is unknown or can't be known]**

North Korea has been at or near the top of the World Watch List for more than 20 years. That's because any North Korean caught following Jesus is at immediate risk of imprisonment, brutal torture and death.

In the past year alone, there have been:

- **Over 360 million Christians living** in places where they experience **high levels of persecution and discrimination**
- **5,898 Christians killed for their faith**
- **5,110 churches** and other Christian **buildings attacked**
- **6,175 believers detained without trial, arrested, sentenced or imprisoned**
- **3,829 Christians abducted**

It's not fair, is it?

Will God bring about **justice**?

That brings us to our story from **1 Kings 21** – about a **vineyard**

And such a **fuss about a vineyard** – which seems like something not worth having a fight about! Especially when we've **just mentioned Afghanistan and North Korea!**

The whole point of the story of the vineyard - is **injustice** – and being clear about God's justice.

[Slide 2-Heading]

My first point this morning is: **God's people can expect to suffer in this world!**

[Slide 2a-suffer]

God's people can expect injustice in this world (1 Kings 21:1-16)

We **pick up the story** in v1 of chapter 21

Where King **Ahab** wants to acquire a **vineyard** from his **neighbour Naboth** who lives **next door** to Ahab's **palace in Jezreel.**

It seems King **Ahab** has taken an **interest** in growing **veggies** and wants to turn Naboth's vineyard into a **veggie patch**. There's Ahab's first mistake – **wanting to grow veggies!**

Ahab is **prepared to give** Naboth an **even better vineyard** as a **swap** and even pay for the **convenience** of having his veggie patch next to his palace (v2)

On face value – it **seems** like a fair offer and exchange.

However, as King – **Ahab has most things at his disposal** – and I reckon he's **being** a bit **covetous** – in wanting the one thing he is not entitled to. As the **10th commandment** says *“you shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything [vineyard] that belongs to your neighbour”*.

Application – **I wonder if we can be a bit like Ahab** and want something that someone else has got – whether it be their house, car, job, wealth – whatever – **instead of being content with what God has given us?**

Naboth is not having a bar of King Ahab's offer – v3 - and **flatly refuses** – on the grounds that he would be giving away his family's inheritance.

The vineyard had been in his family for generations – since the **land** in Israel had been **allocated by God to each tribe**. So, technically the **land belonged to God** and wasn't really owned by the people.

According to God's laws - **land was not to be sold** except under **dire circumstances** – and even then, it was expected that a relative would buy it to keep it in the family. Even when land was sold – it wasn't permanent – and **had to be returned to the original owner in the jubilee year** (50th year) – see Leviticus 25:15, 23-28.

We can gather from Naboth's refusal that **he fears God more than Ahab** – and **he takes God's laws seriously**. Naboth is not prepared to break God's law even if the King asks!

Application – what about us – would we stand up for God's law like this – and take it seriously? Even if it costs us?

Look how **Ahab reacts** to Naboth's refusal – v4 – he **takes himself off to bed and sulks like a two-year-old** – and refuses to have his dinner! **Diddums!**

Enter the delightful Jezebel!

She wants to know why Ahab is so upset and didn't come down for dinner (v5). Ahab tells her of Naboth's refusal (v6)

And v7 reads something like this *"Ahab, are you a king or a wimp? No local grape picker is going to stand in your way. Your problem, Ahab, is that you think the king has to obey*

*the law, you must get through your thick head, Ahab, that whatever the king wants **IS** law!"*

You see – **Jezebel has a Phoenician world view** – which says - **Kings take what they want**. Jezebel’s daddy would never put up with resistance like this from one of his subjects – in her daddy’s regime – **you just run over people like Naboth**.

So, **Jezebel promises** she will **get the vineyard for her husband!**

She goes into action using **Ahab’s letterheads and seals** to send **letters to the elders and nobles** of Naboth’s town (v8) with **explicit instructions** (vv9-10) to **proclaim a fast** – which suggests there is some serious matter to deal with – and **Naboth** is to have a **place of honour at a public gathering** – and the **elders** are to **arrange for two scoundrels** (lowlifes) to come in and **falsely accuse Naboth of cursing God and the King** – and then take him out and **stone him!**

What a **despicable plan!**

And the elders and nobles – don’t refuse the request – they’re not brave like Naboth.

They carry out Jezebel’s orders – they **call a religious day of fasting**.

It may be injustice but it will be **religious** injustice.

And of course, they have the **two witnesses to the charges against Naboth** – as is **required by God’s law** (Deuteronomy 17:6-7; 19:15; Numbers 35:30)

It may be injustice but it will be **legal** injustice.

They’ll **break the 9th commandment** “**you shall not bear false witness against your neighbour**” – but they’ll do it legally by **having two false witnesses!**

It’s **heartless and cruel** isn’t it.

The charges are proven and **Naboth is stoned** – v14.

God's people can expect injustice in this world!

Vv15-16 read like the matter is resolved.

With Naboth gone – the king can now claim his vineyard and **start planting his cabbage and carrots!**

Jezebel has been nothing if not thorough – according to **2 Kings 9:26** – **Naboth's sons were also killed** – preventing any claim by the family to inherit the vineyard upon Naboth's death.

All neat and tidy. **Naboth was dead** – a fact that is **mentioned FIVE times for emphasis** – in verses 13-16!

Application – for us –this chapter ***gives us a true picture of the lot for the people of God*** - it means this is the sort of treatment remnant believers can expect from the rulers of this age.

Ask the Christians of Afghanistan, North Korea, Somalia, Libya and Yemen – and so on. And the Christians in Australia – **that's where we are heading!**

As the **Apostle Peter reminds us** in 1 Peter 4:12

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

Jesus says the same thing in Mark 13:9-13 – His followers – will be - flogged - arrested – **brought to trial** – **betrayed even by family sometimes** – and hated for following Jesus!

And ***sometimes this injustice will be inflicted by governments and/or courts*** – it may be by government ordained policies like in Afghanistan and North Korea – or subtle ignoring of God's word – like in Australia – **so that Christians are given a raw deal** [Like - Andrew Thorburn CEO of Essendon; Margaret Court, Israel Folau).

But we have a Naboth in the New Testament who understands how God's people experience injustice.

This Naboth is our Lord Jesus – He too experienced injustice - He too was convicted and sentenced to death – on false charges of blaspheming by claiming to be God – and treason claiming to be King – when only Caesar can be king

What if this injustice should come to us?

What if we were to suffer like Naboth?

Well – **the Apostle Paul tells us in 2 Cor 1:5** – *just as we share in the terrible sufferings of Jesus, we also share in his wonderful comfort that He gives too!*

God's people must be prepared to pay the price of standing for justice (1 Kings 21:8-14)

[Slide 2b-price]

Which bring us to my second point – ***God's people must be prepared to pay the price of standing for justice***

This whole episode could have been stopped!

There was **no protest against Jezebel's scheme!**

No attempt to defend Naboth!

The elders and nobles of Jezreel could have stood their ground.

Instead like bureaucratic robots they played right along. Like **puppets on a string!**

What would have happened if they refused?

They **knew Jezebel was not used to anyone saying "no" to her!**

If they made a stand – they had families, livelihoods and a desire to live. Who knows what the Jezebel mafia of Samaria might do if they didn't toe the line?

We may understand the elders and nobles' dilemma – but the **story is telling us that injustice flourishes not only by wickedness but by weakness – not merely from a lack of goodness – but a lack of guts!**

Application – can we see how sin snowballs here. A covetous desire by Ahab – leads to an **evil plan** by Jezebel – which in turn **leads two witnesses to lie** – which in turn **leads the town leaders to kill an innocent man** – and **leads to Ahab acquiring a vineyard that does not belong to him** – and **leads to an innocent man's family and inheritance destroyed** – which **leads to Ahab's dynasty being destroyed** – and Jezebel wiped out – and ultimately to the whole **10 tribes of Israel** – going off into **Exile in Assyria (722BC)** – **horrendous consequences.**

This should make us think about the consequences of our sinful words and actions.

Application – for us it also means – **we must be prepared to make a stand against injustice** – and **be prepared to pay the price in that stand.**

As the saying goes *“bad things happen when good people do nothing”*

When we break the story down – it all **comes down to one of our favourite idols: the fear of man** – in this case a woman – **rather than the fear of God.**

Application – Jesus warns us about this in Matthew 10:18 – He says:

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Naboth may have had his **body killed** – but his stand for God's word and God's law – **meant his soul is intact.** Whereas **Ahab, Jezebel, the elders and nobles** – all kept their **bodies** – but their souls are heading for Hell – because they do not fear God!

We're faced with that same decision

(pause)

God will intervene to bring justice to His wronged people (1 Kings 21:17-26) and 2 Thessalonians 1:1-10

At the end of v16 – it seems like the perfect crime! Jezebel is likely congratulating herself on a job well done.

Ahab – her **ever obedient husband** – had gone down to claim **“his”** vineyard.

Then from v17 onwards – the **word of God invades and disturbs the “peace”**.

No-one is exempt from the scrutiny and judgment of God’s word.

Doesn’t **this passage bring great consolation to God’s people.**

God’s people have been pushed and shoved and squashed all along the timeline of history – even today.

But the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite – v17

The word of God says to Ahab – v19A – *“have you not murdered a man and seized his property?”*

Notice God says Ahab is the murderer!

God clearly held Ahab responsible for the murder of Naboth a) **as the husband of wicked Jezebel who came up with the plan and didn’t stop her** [like Adam failed to stop Eve]; b) **as the King who is more accountable because he is supposed to uphold God’s law on behalf of the people but he ignored God’s word and God’s evidence on Mount Carmel;** and c) Ahab is accountable as **the beneficiary of the crime.**

The word of God says to Ahab – v19 – *“in the place where dogs licked up Naboth’s blood, dogs will lick up your blood, Ahab”*

The word of God says to Ahab – v20 *“you have sold yourself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord”*

And v21 *“I am going to bring disaster on you, Ahab”*

When Elijah brings these words from God – it's **not a news leak** from someone involved– it's because - **God knows and sees everything**.

God sees the helpless Naboth's of this world.

And there are **many Naboth's in this world.**

Let me tell you about Clementine – a 17-year-old girl in Rwanda – militia troops invaded her village – she hid in a church – she saw people gunned down before her eyes – she tried to run – but the soldiers caught her in the bush – they raped and bashed her – left her for dead.

A Belgian doctor flew Clementine to Europe – where she had surgery. The doctors there discovered she had HIV – full blown AIDS – she received care and Christian witness – she became a believer in Jesus – but sadly died anyway.

Stories like Clementine shrink 1 Kings 21 in to **pretty meagre consolation**.

God didn't intervene to prevent Clementine's horror in the bush.

That's part of the problem of 1 Kings 21 – God didn't protect Naboth either.

God's word intervened and nailed Ahab – but Naboth is dead!

If God is so passionate about injustice why was his justice so late in arriving?

This is the mystery of God's restraint that pervades the whole Bible.

Why did God preserve baby Moses from Pharaoh's extermination program – but not the other baby Israelite boys? (Ex 2:1-10; Ex 1:22)

Why did Jesus the toddler escape Herod's baby boy extermination program but not the other youngsters in Bethlehem (Matt 2:16)

Why was John the Baptist beheaded (Mark 6:14-29) and James executed (Acts 12:1-2) but Peter experiences an angelic jail break (Acts 12:6-11)

We can't help but be nagged by this mystery.

But what we can say is that the Naboth story tells us – there is **no guarantee of immunity from suffering – even death** – but **there is a guarantee of justice** – and **not necessarily – in November 2022!**

But **it will come**

God will intervene!

[Slide 2c-God will intervene]

Which is my third point - **God will intervene to bring justice to His wronged people.**

You see 1 Kings 21 is a **preview** of our NT reading from 2 Thessalonians 1:6-7

⁶ God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you ⁷ and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well.

God will intervene to bring justice to His wronged people!

This will happen when God's appointed Judge – His Son – Jesus – **returns and punishes** all who do not know God and do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus.

We must not allow our quandary over the timing of God's justice - **to eclipse our comfort in knowing He will bring justice to His wronged people.**

That's the comfort God's people **oppressed in Afghanistan, North Korea and so on – hang on to.**

Naboth's story is the consolation all believers can have - that despite what happened to Naboth – God will **not let such evil go unpunished.**

God delights in exercising mercy whilst implementing His justice (1 Kings 21:27-29)

There's one more point to be made in this chapter.

And it's to do with how Ahab **reacts** to the word of God from Elijah and **how Ahab receives God's judgment**

See v27 – **Ahab tore his clothes – put on sackcloth – and fasted.**

We may be surprised by that?

Or we may think – **Ahab's bunging it on?**

But I'd argue we're all surprised by God's response to Ahab's alleged remorse - see v29 – God says to Elijah - *“Have you noticed how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself, I will not bring this disaster in his day, but I will bring it on his house in the days of his son.”*

We might be thinking

God's not going to fall for Ahab's torn clothes and sackcloth routine surely?

Why should God cut this Samaritan scumbag any slack?

What we must realize about v29 is that God postpones the judgment against Ahab's dynasty but He does not cancel it. God changes the timetable but does not remove it from the agenda.

But we may ask. Surely Ahab's “repentance” is not sincere?

Looking at v27 – God's judgment made quite an impression on Ahab.

It's likely Ahab's repentance is sincere at that moment but perhaps not lasting – it is serious but temporary. After all – he didn't relinquish his hold on the vineyard – and he still has the influence of his delightful wife – Jezebel – to corrupt him again.

Perhaps we should see Ahab's response as remorse not repentance?

Where does this leave us?

[Slide 2d-delights in mercy]

Back to God – and to my fourth point - ***that God delights in exercising mercy whilst implementing justice.***

Can we see that God is delighted in v29 – it's like He's nudging Elijah “*have you noticed how Ahab humbled himself*” and can we see God's readiness to relent when He says “I will not bring disaster in Ahab's day”

Instead of looking at this and saying - **how dodgy Ahab's repentance is** – remember our repentance can be a bit dodgy sometimes – we repent of something – and the very same day – repeat the offence?

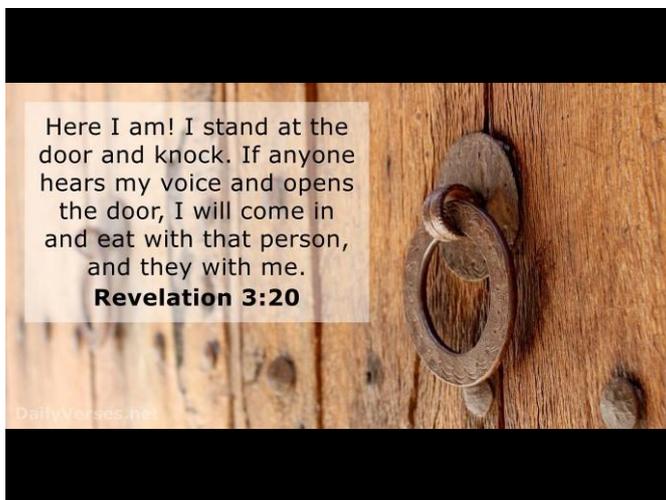
Isn't God's mercy here to Ahab – an appeal to Ahab to go into a deeper repentance?

Give back the vineyard? Turn away from Jezebel? Turn back to God? Isn't that what our God is like?

How much more mercy will Ahab find, if he were to persevere in his repentance?

Isn't that the offer Jesus makes to all sinners – in Revelation 3:20 – which we will finish with?

[Slide 3-Revelation 3:20]



Jesus says: ²⁰ *Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.*

Why does Jesus hang around knocking on doors?

Doesn't Ahab just need to repent and open the door?

It's his soul and our souls that matter – not our bodies!

Everyone needs to open the door to Jesus – and it's never too late to repent and open that door!

Let's pray...

Dear God,

Thank you that you will not let sin and evil go unpunished and that you pay back trouble to those who trouble your people.

Help all Christians to persevere in their sufferings and trials knowing that they not only share in Jesus' sufferings but also share in the comfort He brings.

Father God, thank you that you delight in mercy – even as you implement your justice – and you offer all people the opportunity of repentance and the grace of our Lord Jesus – who stands at the door knocking – help all to open the door and open their hearts to Jesus!

In His Name, we pray, Amen.

Benediction

²⁴ To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— ²⁵ to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.