

Exposition of
1 Kings 21

Sermon Series:
Spiritual Lessons from OT Kings

Sermon Title:
Covetousness an Enemy of the
Heart.

Lesson from King Ahab

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INTRODUCTION

As we have been spending time considering various spiritual lessons from the lives of the OT Kings, I hope that you would agree with me when I say: that there is no written work in all of secular literature which so perfectly exposes the deep flaws of mankind's heart like the Word of God.

It is the compass, the standard, the guide, the ultimate interpreter of the thoughts which proceed from the heart. It searches us and by the power of God the Spirit it speaks to all those areas of our lives that no one else can see. One such example of its living testimony of man's heart is found here in today's text dealing with the sin of covetousness.

If Pride could be considered the king of sins, then surely covetousness could be considered his silent prince.

By their own example as recorded in today's text Ahab and his wife Jezebel plainly teach us about this great enemy of our hearts - covetousness. It could be said that **a covetous heart is one which craves personal and earthly benefits over and above the Lord's interests and the needs of others.** What's more, their examples offer for us the very simple and basic tenants of a covetous heart – one which craves things, so much so, that its very happiness is effected if the object of its focus and its craving is not obtained.

King Ahab's heart craved something which wasn't his, and it's plain that all his joy, his sense of fulfilment and happiness depended upon getting it, and so it is in our own day when some of us don't get our own way or don't acquire that which we set our eyes and hearts upon, we are then robbed of the true joy and contentment which is ours through the Lord Jesus, thus making today's spiritual lesson so relevant.

Ah, but wait. Perhaps some of us are already approaching this text today excusing ourselves from the vile display of

covetousness we see exhibited in the lives of these two rebels. But to do so we would forfeit the lesson which the Spirit desires to teach us about this great enemy of our heart – covetousness.

How offensive it is to the Lord, Who made us to be the highest of His creatures, made in His own image, and Who by His grace gives us the ability to know Him...how offensive it is to Him to see us groveling for satisfaction in this material realm; hungering and thirsting only for things that have to do with this present life all the while the Lord is slowly but effectively put in second place as the true and primary source of our satisfaction and security. Oh yes, **we may say we love Him, but do we love him enough to be completely fulfilled and satisfied by Him.** Or perhaps, we may to some degree or another find a little bit of Ahab in ourselves, by which our hearts are shifted off center and our happiness and contentment fluctuates like reeds in the wind.

May the God the Spirit now come and teach us and apply the power of the truth of His Word to our hearts and minds.

The people before us today:

Naboth a God fearing man, simply and faithful.

1 Kings 17:29-33 **Ahab & Jezebel** (a murderer of God's prophets) Obadiah saved some.

Elijah – God's preacher from Gilead, a Tishbite, family genealogy unknown and apparently unimportant regarding the life and work God's raised him up to do, lived in the wilderness, fed by ravens and widows scraps.

BODY

vv.1-3 AHAB REJECTED

- Note the description of Naboth vs. Ahab
- **(Num.36:7)** The idea of inheritance was very strong in the faith of God's people. It had been commanded by the Lord that a person was to maintain the inheritance that had been given to him by his father. Num 36:7 So shall not the inheritance of the children of Israel remove from tribe to tribe: for every one of the children of Israel shall keep himself to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers.
- Faithfulness (Naboth) vs. Greed (Ahab)

~ Now we begin to see the effects of covetousness which serve for us as warnings of their danger.

vv.4-6 AHAB'S TURMOIL

- Heavy & Displeased – Heavy in the Hebrew means to be stubborn and peevish, emphasizing self-indulgence. It has the same root as the word used to describe an untamed, brute beast in Hosea 4:16 and to describe a stubborn son who would not submit to his parents in Deut. 21:18 – indicating that Ahab was restless and stubborn in his greed.
Displeased has the root word meaning to fret or be jealous in anger!

- v.4 “And he laid him down upon his bed, face turned, not eating”
This conflict, this turmoil of Ahab was not brought about with trouble in the nations, not by wars or rumors of wars, no, it was his

own self-inflicted suffering because he could not force a man to go against the commands of his God and give Ahab that which he coveted

#1 COVETOUNESS TAKES OVER THE HEART

This is why covetousness is so particularly offensive to God, because it takes over the heart, pushing out all other spiritual and higher desires, it pushes out singular focus upon God's will for the lower base things of this old world. **Covetousness is like the river's floodwaters that have broken over her banks not knowing any rational direction or self-control.**

In the parable of the sower the Lord Jesus speaks of those who, like Ahab, are choked out with the cares, riches and pleasures of this life and thus cut themselves off from the Word of God, unable to manifest any spiritual convictions or spiritual fruit because their hearts and minds are so focused on other things rather than spiritual matters.

v.6 "...he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard."

• #2 COVETOUNESS WEAKENS/HARDENS the HEART

• Here we see evidence of another reason why any intelligent and reasonable person would agree that **covetousness, no matter the proportion, is a wicked enemy of the heart because it has the damaging ability to weaken and hardens us against our neighbor!**

This, I believe is revealed to a degree, when we observe the manner in which Ahab shares with his wife Jezebel the reason for his 'inner' turmoil.

Notice how his conscious is weakened by the fact that he hides his real ambitions for his own self-indulgence in Naboth's

vineyard by leaving out the noble and God honoring reason for Naboth's refusal. The actual reason Naboth gave in v.3 "The LORD forbid it me..."

With a weakened and self-deceived conscious Ahab becomes even more hardened and only wants to make Naboth appear unreasonable, obstinate and dis-respectful to the royal crown in the eyes of his envious, and intolerant wife.

It is as if his answer to Jezebel went something like this "Can you believe the sheer audacity of Naboth, a lowly peasant from Jezreel to refuse our royal authority!"

APPLICATION: Likewise in our own day, we too as followers of the One, True and living God say along with Naboth 'The LORD forbid it me' regarding many things.

As His children of light, we believe like Naboth that which this world is blinded to" "That the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but the fools despise wisdom" (Prov.1:7)

We as God's people, believe the words of Him through whom all things were created, we by faith accept the royal scepter of Jesus and his royal law which declares: "fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (Mat 10:28)

THEREFORE - 'Our LORD forbids it us' to acknowledge a 'so-called' marriage between two men or two women as a sacred union in the eyes of God, 'Our LORD forbids it us' to participate in making wedding cakes, taking pictures, doing anything that causes us to weaken or harden our conscious against the precepts and principals of God's Holy Writ, "Our LORD forbids it us" to subject our children, our precious heritage from God Himself to the indoctrination of Satan suggesting that they can shake their fist at their Maker and decide for themselves if they are a boy or a girl...we say No, we say No...together church we say No – despite whatever persecution that it may bring upon our heads!

~ Now that faithful and innocent Naboth has been falsely portrayed to Jezebel by the pouting and moping King acting like a little child we begin to see another reason why covetousness is a real and dangerous enemy – It is infectious!

v.7 AN APPEAL TO PRIDE

• #3 COVETOUNESS IS INFECTIOUS

In the response of Jezebel we see her appealing to the pride of her hardened husband and king. In a very real and diabolical way this slithering snake of a woman, this hater of all of those who are true followers of God, this worshiper of Baal sees an opportunity to lay her devilish eggs of evil in the incubator of the king's heart.

This is another aspect of why Covetousness is to be feared as an enemy of our hearts...because of its infectious nature.

Now that Ahab's self pampering and focus upon luxury, upon an unnecessary and unessential vineyard has taken up root in his heart and mind **the covetous sin goes on to infect the already wicked heart of his wife, which is predisposed to such envy and greed.**

APPLICATION: Regarding our local churches...seeing then that covetousness can be infectious, if intended or not, we would do good as more mature Christians, those who are a little further along and established in life (materially speaking) if we not draw unduly attention to our material possessions.

Why? Because of our love and sincere care for one another, especially those younger in the faith. We would not want to potentially cause those who are younger in the faith, just starting out in life to become mistaken that earthly comforts and luxuries which we may own are in anyway our source of happiness or moreover our primary focus above the things of God.

In the same line of thought, those who may have or possess less than someone else in the church should guard their hearts as well from envying or coveting their neighbor and fellow brother in the Church as is required by the Tenth Commandment. What terrible havoc can be brought upon a church through covetousness...I would only add that perhaps only gossip can equal it as one of the most infectious and damaging of sins to hit a church.

vv.8-15 COVETOUS PLANNING

• #4 IT IS ADDICTIVE & PROGRESSIVE

v.9 To proclaim a fast indicated that there was a serious sin amongst the people, so serious in fact it deserved death.

v.9 “...set Naboth on high...” meaning among the elders as one under suspicion, awaiting a trial.

v.10 “...sons of Belial...” known as the most vile among them, men who would sell their own mothers for only a few pieces of silver.

v.14 Notice who they sent confirmation to: Jezebel not Ahab.

v.15 “...he refused to give thee for money...” still blinded, still hardened.

~ It is here that what is done by the covetous hearts of men appears to be unseen by eye of God as Ahab goes on in the next verse to rise up and take possession of Naboth's vineyard.

vv.16-19 POSSESSION and the PROPHET

• It is at this moment we pause as we have done many times before in this series of messages and ask is God blind to what has been

done to His servant Naboth, is God's hands tied up by the actions of mankind his creation that he can not take action.

Where is God? Where is God?

v.17 “*And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite..*” for every man Satan has to propagate the lies of hell, God has a man to declare his truth. For every man the devil deceives with his empty lies to sell himself into his service, God has a man whom He renews with the blessed reality of His Spirit to voluntarily pledge himself, his life, his all and all to the cause of Christ.

v.19 “*..Hast thou killed, and also taken possession?*” Not questioning the omniscience (knowledge of God), rather meaning did you really think that you would get away with such wickedness!

v.19 The dogs shall lick thy blood. Fulfilled in a battle that took place (1Kings 22:38).

~ The irony of where a covetous heart will lead a person is plainly revealed for us in v.20 in the confrontation between the King and the Prophet, because it is at this very moment which Ahab thought his greed was being brought to a completion was the very moment of God's Judgement upon his Soul!

v.20 SELLING YOURSELF TO EVIL

“Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?” This reveals the apprehension Ahab felt on seeing the man of God. There would have been many who would have welcomed his presence, viewed it as a blessing and privilege...however Ahab, knowing the truth of what his wife had done he viewed Elijah's presence as a death sentence!

• Elijah's answer in v.20 to the king's question indicates perhaps the most shocking truth regarding just how dangerous covetousness truly is to our hearts – he says “*thou hast sold thyself to work evil...*” **meaning that Ahab's covetousness had in effect lead him to sell his soul to the devil. Sold his soul for present benefits. Sold his soul for temporary pleasure. Sold his soul in the sight of the LORD for false security and self-indulgence!**

Of course this reminds of the word of our beloved Paul the Apostle who says in **2 Tim. 3:1-2 that “In the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous...”**

• #5 COVETOUSNESS IS A ROOT OF APOSTASY

The cost to pursue covetousness, the ultimate price of unchecked greed or lust, always craving and wanting more and more and never being content is a person's own soul.

Covetousness demands a compromise of one's character, it requires a divided heart – and for anyone who has been ensnared by this silent, invisible enemy better be crystal clear of this one truth – covetousness will take you farther and deeper than you ever anticipated on going and end up costing you your soul!

• **vv.21-24 JUDGEMENT PROPHESED**

v.21 “*...take away thy posterity...*” this occurs under the reign of Jehu – all seventy of Ahab's sons (potential heirs) heads were cut off and delivered to Jehu in baskets. (2Kings10:1-11)

v.22 “...provoked me to anger...” of course not implying that God has carnal emotions as ourselves, but language that helps us better understand that there are particular sins which are more

heinous than others, which we recently discussed in our Baptist Catechism classes. (Q.88 – Sin).

v.23 “Jezebel...the dogs shall eat by the wall of Jezreel”
this occurs in (2 Kings 9:30-37)

CLOSING

I pray as we walk away from today’s message we see the true face of covetousness. That we would guard our hearts from this powerful enemy which is constantly flaunted before us by the world.

Satan knows, that if by covetousness he can deceive us in believing that our hope, happiness, security or satisfaction depends upon our own desires – then he can slowly but surely lead us farther and farther from the Christ who is one where all desires can truly be fulfilled.

Jhn 4:13 Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: 4:14 But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.