

“Ahab’s Repentance”
1 Kings 21:20-29
(Preached at Trinity, October 17, 2021)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. The account before us here in **Chapter 21** deals with a peasant farmer by the name of Naboth. He had a vineyard located near the summer palace of Ahab. Ahab decided the plot would be a great location for a vegetable garden and he determined that he must have it. And as the king he thought he deserved it. As I pointed out last week, it wasn’t a necessity that he have it. It wasn’t essential for him to have it. He just wanted it.
2. Ahab was powerful and believed he had the right to whatever he desired, and he wanted Naboth’s vineyard. But Naboth was not willing to give it up. When Ahab told Jezebel her response was typical. Verse 7 paraphrased— “What! Aren’t you the king? Are you going to allow that peasant to stand in the way of your plans? I’ll take care of it for you.” And she did. She put her plan into action. Using Ahab’s credentials she ordered a fast and ordered that Naboth be invited to sit at the head of the table. Then she ordered that he be falsely accused of both blasphemy and treason. He was then taken out and stoned to death. It was all neat and tidy; problem solved.
3. Upon hearing of Naboth’s death Ahab didn’t ask too many questions. He immediately headed over to Naboth’s vineyard and took possession. He must have been proudly walking through the plot of ground planning where each vegetable would be planted. It would be a wonderful garden worthy of a king. His victory would be short-lived. God was already preparing Elijah to head over to Ahab’s new garden to pronounce judgment.
1 Kings 21:19 NAU - "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."
4. At first Ahab wasn’t impressed by Elijah’s arrival. Elijah was the royal enemy. Jezebel had already ordered his execution.
 - A. Would he dare to show his face to Ahab.
Verse 20 - "Ahab said to Elijah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" Elijah and Ahab were enemies, but it wasn’t of Elijah’s doing. Pastors lament making enemies but it is most grievous when it’s because God’s Word is rejected.
 - B. But then the words began to sink in.
1 Kings 21:21-22 NAU - "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."

- C. God knew not only of Jezebel's operation, He also knew of Ahab's guilt in the matter. And notice in **Verse 18** that God still refers to it as "the vineyard of Naboth."
5. **Verses 21-26** describe God's scathing condemnation upon Ahab. With Elijah's declaration of God's condemnation upon Ahab and his entire house he was smitten with repentance—or so it would seem.
1 Kings 21:27 NAU - "It came about when Ahab heard these words, that he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and fasted, and he lay in sackcloth and went about despondently."
6. Was this true repentance?
- I. One of the marks of genuine repentance is it endures. It is continual. There is a persevering desire for the holiness of God.
- A. Scripture has numerous examples of temporary remorse and repentance.
1. Pharaoh repeatedly repented of his actions but quickly returned to his stubbornness.
Exodus 8:28 NAU - "Pharaoh said, "I will let you go, that you may sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only you shall not go very far away. Make supplication for me."
Exodus 8:32 NAU - "But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and he did not let the people go."
 2. One of the best examples was Nineveh. The text tells us the Ninevites repented before God.
 - a. After Jonah pronounced God's judgment upon Nineveh we read:
Jonah 3:5-10 NAU - "Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. ⁶ When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered *himself* with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. ⁷ He issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. ⁸ "But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. ⁹ "Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish." ¹⁰ When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do *it*."
 - b. But it wasn't a lasting repentance and in the end, God destroyed them. Nahum was sent to announce judgment upon Assyria
Nahum 1:1-7 NAU - "The oracle of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite. ² A jealous and avenging God is the LORD; The LORD is avenging and wrathful. The LORD takes vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies. ³ The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, And the LORD will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished.
 - c. Nineveh fell to a coalition of the Medes and Babylonians in 612 BC

3. Judas Iscariot repented that he had betrayed Christ but wasn't willing to confess and submit to Christ. He went out and hung himself.
Matthew 27:3-5 NAU - "Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, ⁴ saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? See *to that* yourself!" ⁵ And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself."
 4. The question is, was Ahab's repentance genuine?
- B. True repentance presupposes an acknowledgement of personal sin and genuine sorrow.
1. Did Ahab acknowledge his sin? We cannot know his heart, but he did express grief and sorrow.
 2. Sackcloth was an ancient demonstration of mourning
1 Kings 21:27 NAU - "he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and fasted, and he lay in sackcloth and went about despondently."
 3. It could be that Ahab's sorrow was sorrow because of the coming judgment upon his house, not sorrow that he had offended God. And we find no evidence that Ahab was crying out to God for mercy.
 4. We cannot know Ahab's heart, but the text tells us God received it. Ahab wasn't asking for mercy, but he received mercy.
1 Kings 21:29 NAU - "Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days"
- II. We need to understand the nature of the Old Covenant.
- A. The Old Covenant was preparatory. It foreshadowed truths that would find their fulfillment in the New Covenant. It looked forward to Christ.
1. Old Covenant saints were saved the same way as New Covenant saints
 No one has ever been saved apart from repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ.
 - a. Salvation for the OT patriarchs involved believing in God's salvation through a future promised Deliverer, although their understanding of this Deliverer was greatly veiled. They believed in the Savior to come.
 Children's Catechism:
 61. Q. How were pious persons saved before the coming of Christ?
 A. By believing in a Saviour to come.
 - b. We believe in progressive revelation. God has revealed His redemptive purpose little by little. We have the benefit of looking backward at God's full revelation of His redemptive purpose. They were looking forward at a time when there was still much to be revealed.

2. Even though they had incomplete understanding, OT saints were still saved by turning from their sin and trusting in God's promise of salvation.
Romans 4:3 NAU - "For what does the Scripture say? "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."
Galatians 3:6 NAU - "Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."

- B. It is also true that in the Old Covenant we find God often bringing temporal judgment upon the wickedness of men.
1. We can see this with the flood.
 2. We can see it with the Egyptians. They suffered the plagues of God's temporal judgment as God repeatedly warned them to repent.
 3. Israel often suffered the temporal judgment of God. An entire generation died in the wilderness.
 4. Jonah came pronouncing God's temporal judgment upon Nineveh. Nineveh's repentance turned away God's temporal judgment. Their repentance did not involve the permanent change of heart through regeneration. They would quickly return to their wickedness and God would destroy their nation.
 5. It is probable the Ahab's repentance was of this sort. He trembled at Elijah's pronouncement of God's judgment and put on sackcloth. God saw his humble confession of his sin and turned away from His judgment. The judgment was postponed, but it was not cancelled. Ahab still bore his guilt.

III. What stands out in this passage is God's great mercy upon sinful men

- A. God demonstrates His mercy over and over
1. We are living in an age of mercy. No one is receiving the full penalty of their sin in this life, and all are being called to repentance. Judgment is being postponed.
 2. **Verse 25** tells us that Ahab exceeded the sins of every king before him, and they were exceedingly wicked.
1 Kings 21:25 NAU - "Surely there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the sight of the LORD"
 3. And yet, God demonstrated His mercy.
 This is what we saw with the Ninevites. Jonah came announcing God's judgment and they repented in sackcloth and ashes. The mere fact that God sent Jonah was an act of mercy. And even though their repentance was temporary, God delayed His judgment.
Nahum 1:2-3 NAU - ". . .The LORD is avenging and wrathful. The LORD takes vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies. ³ The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, And the LORD will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished.
Ezekiel 18:32 NAU - "For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord GOD. "Therefore, repent and live."

- B. God's sending of Elijah was an act of mercy. Ahab had the opportunity for repentance. Ahab, at least momentarily owned his sin, and God showed him mercy.
1. It would be a temporary reprieve
1 Kings 21:29 NAU - "I will not bring the evil in his days, *but* I will bring the evil upon his house in his son's days."
 2. Like Nineveh, Ahab's repentance was not a permanent change of heart. It was not genuine faith and repentance. God gave him a temporal reprieve by His great mercy, a postponement of judgment. This does not mean that Ahab's judgment was cancelled in eternity.
 God's judgment upon the house of Ahab would surely come. Ahab would continue his wickedness and God would bring judgment. Both Ahab and Jezebel would suffer horrendous deaths, as well as all of Ahab's sons, just as God declared.
2 Kings 10:1 NAU - "Now Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria."
2 Kings 10:6-8 NAU - "Now the king's sons, seventy persons, were with the great men of the city, *who* were rearing them. ⁷ When the letter came to them, they took the king's sons and slaughtered *them*, seventy persons, and put their heads in baskets, and sent *them* to him at Jezreel. ⁸ When the messenger came and told him, saying, "They have brought the heads of the king's sons," he said, "Put them in two heaps at the entrance of the gate until morning."
2 Kings 10:11 NAU - "So Jehu killed all who remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men and his acquaintances and his priests, until he left him without a survivor."
 3. What would have happened if Ahab had truly repented? What grace and mercy he would have received, both now and forever?

Conclusion:

1. What is essential is whether we have truly repented. Do we bear the marks of genuine repentance?
 "Repentance unto life, is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth with grief and hatred of his sin turn from it unto God, with full purpose to strive after new obedience."
2. Has Christ had such an effect upon your life that you have fled from your sin and are now following Him with all your heart.
3. True repentance is a heart-felt turn from sin with a desire to honor Christ. True repentance is a permanent change of heart—a lasting change.