

Reflecting on God's Word

Reading: 1 Kings 21:1-10 (OT page 364)

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Background of the reading

In our text this morning we have a typical example of how the people in biblical times thought of their property. In biblical Israel they all had "limited goods" which meant that every person had inherited the same size of land. If you had more than your share, you were regarded as a robber and a thief. According to Old Testament law every family and its inherited plot of land were meant to be inseparable.

Now in reading it seems as if the king wants to have even more and typically Naboth refused to sell of his land. He was probably of the view that the king is greedy to have more land. After all his land was his own inheritance from his forefathers and that was all that he had. And even the king's offer to give him another piece of land, would have been viewed as quite suspicious. Where would the king get such a vineyard? To take someone else's land even as a gift would have been regarded a stealing!

It was a society of shame and honour. Money did not mean anything. Your honour was much more than important than money and to sell of your birthright, your piece of land, would have been regarded as shameful. According to the Jews every inheritance of a piece of land was regarded as a gift from God that was holy. Another reason might have been that his forefathers were buried there which made his ties with his piece of land emotionally tighter. He was expected by his family to keep his inherited land. So Naboth refused the king's offer of money.

Ahab sulked but accepted the situation. Not so Jezebel, who could not understand why a king of Israel should not get his own way. He did not explain to her the cultural reasons of Naboth's refusal and his obligations as a Jewish king. An Israelite king was bound

by the law of Yahweh as much as any of his subjects, but to Jezebel, the daughter of a Phoenician monarch, it was ridiculous that her husband's wishes could not be met. So when she said that he must be of good cheer because she will get him the vineyard, he did not stop her or asked her any questions. In many ways he was just as guilty as she was!

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. The letters proclaimed a day of fasting. A day of fasting usually happened in times of hardship and disasters. This day was appropriate because according to chapter 17 Israel experienced a great drought. On this day Naboth must be seated in the front seat like in a court. Two other people must then attest that Naboth have sinned against God and the king. In those days you only needed to witnesses to condemn you, in this case to death. The punishment for these offences was stoning. It is possible that his whole surviving family were stoned with him like it happened in the case of Achan in Joshua 7.

Usually the king received the property of anyone who got the death penalty. Although Naboth faced the trumped-up charge of breaking the commandment in Ex. 22:28, but in reality the commandments against wanting a neighbour's property, murder, theft and false testimony were all broken by Ahab and Jezebel in this distasteful incident.

So the prophet Elijah re-enters the story, commissioned with the task of prophesying disaster for Ahab's house. Although it was Jezebel who had actually engineered Naboth's death, Ahab did not try to deter her. He did not bother to ask what Jezebel intended to do when she promised him the vineyard, and he was content to fade into the background until Naboth was dead. The prophet told him that he had *murdered a man and seized his property*. Surprisingly Ahab, the worst yet of Israel's kings, showed the most repentance. In response, God told Elijah that judgment would not fall on Ahab himself, but on his son. The

and us so much more. Let's be realistic – the characteristics of the promised king as an earthly human being is not realistic. We all know ourselves. For a human being it is not possible to "reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land". We are fallible and utterly corrupt. I mean to say how many governments; earthly kingdoms have come and gone!

It is no wonder God had to intervene himself. He became the shepherd king Himself. In Jesus Christ He was much more than David could ever be. David and Ahab are just typical human prototypes. Jesus is God and saved humanity from sin, death and hell.

- Unlike Ahab, Jesus the Shepherd king never ever faltered, or went back on His words.
- Unlike any other earthly king you do not have to make a special appointment and pay a fortune to visit His palace. HE is everywhere. He has already paid the price with HIS blood.
- Unlike any other earthly king you do not have to stand in long queues to see him. Actually you can have a special personal relationship with HIM by honouring and obeying HIM, through faith alone.
- Unlike any other earthly king you do not have to be of royal descent or decorated to even speak to HIM. You just need faith to speak to him. And you can speak to him anytime you want to. And in our congregation there are a lot of opportunities to pray with others, if you do not want to pray alone.
- Unlike any other earthly king He does not go on holiday or a weekend away.
- Unlike any other royalty He does not appear in Gossip tabloids. We have never to be ashamed of the things He did and said!
- Jesus became the example of everything and more than what the people expected. But till this day, the Jews are still waiting for this promised King who will change all the wrongs to the right!

So yes we have to proclaim our faith and trust in God who gave us the King of love, a king who included everyone in his mercy. A king who sacrificed His own life for the sins of humanity.

May we remember this when we honour the baby Jesus in a few weeks time! May the bad example of Ahab be our wakeup call when we rely too much on human beings.

May the proclamation of the Guild members' faith in the Shepherd king be an example of sacrifice, love, mercy, forgiveness and hope to us all.

Amen