

What's Your Price?

My Uncle James Taylor, not to be confused with the singer/songwriter, was a salesman who bought and sold anything and everything. He was an antique dealer, bought and sold and traded antique cars. He was a picker before we knew what a picker was I suppose. He knew how to bargain for the best price. "What would you take for that? "What's your low dollar on that?" He figured everyone had a price. Everyone would sell or buy, if the price was right.

What would you sell yourself for? "I'm not for sale." Are you sure? Jesus asked, **"What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul." Mark 8:36-37.** In one way Jesus was asking, "What's your price? What would you sell your soul for?"

Turn with me to **1 Kings 21**. This is a story about Israel's wicked King Ahab and his wife, Queen Jezebel. I think it's been a few years since I preached about this event. There is a statement made concerning Ahab that always grabs my attention, that he "sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord." Ahab had a price and he accepted it and sold himself to do evil.. Let's read this story and see what we can learn. (Read the story from 1-16).

Ahab was the king of Israel. We first hear about him in 1 Kings 16:29-33 and it is not a ringing endorsement. Ahab built a temple and shrine to Baal. He allowed his wicked wife to order the execution of the prophets of God, including a threat to have Elijah the prophet killed. The bible says **"Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him." 1 Kings 16:33**

Ahab was the seventh king of Israel (the northern kingdom) and his wife, Jezebel, was the daughter of the ruler of the Sidonians or Phoenicia, what is actually now Lebanon. The bible says in addition to their palace in Samaria, they also had a palace in Jezreel, overlooking the Jezreel valley (which is also known as the valley of Armageddon). Apparently this was a winter retreat or summer palace built in addition to their main palace in Samaria.

King Ahab looks out from his palace and sees a family vineyard that belonged to a man named Naboth. Ahab decides he wants that vineyard. He wants to turn it into a vegetable garden, of all things. Now understand the Jezreel valley was then and still is the richest agricultural area in Israel. The King could have hired people all over the valley to raise vegetables for him. Instead, like a spoiled child that doesn't want anyone else to have any toys,

he wanted the land that already belonged to Naboth and his family. It had been in his family for generations. Ahab offered to buy it and notice in verse 2 he offered to exchange Naboth's vineyard for an even better vineyard. He indicates he wants this particular vineyard because it is so close to the palace. The truth is, it was about power – it was about a spoiled, dictatorial king who only wanted to please himself with no regard for anyone else.

He offered Naboth a better vineyard or was willing to pay whatever Naboth thought the vineyard was worth. That certainly seemed fair didn't it? The problem was, Naboth didn't want to sell. With Naboth, it was more than just a business deal. It wasn't that the money offered was inadequate – he could name his price. It wasn't that he had a sentimental attachment to the land although I'm sure he had. He was raised there, just as his father and grandfather had been. But it went deeper than that. It was about obedience to God and his word. Naboth understood that God had given this land to the individual clans and families of the twelve tribes of Israel. It was not to be sold because it was an inheritance - not just from his father but from the Lord. This land, this vineyard was part of the promise of God fulfilled to Naboth and his fathers before him and he wouldn't sell it for any price.

Notice what Naboth said in rejecting Ahab's offer: **“The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.” 21:3** And then notice what Ahab did and said. He went home, “sullen and angry” the bible says, went into his room and “lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat.” (What is he...five years old?) Jezebel came in and wanted to know what was wrong. Notice Ahab misrepresented what Naboth said. He told Jezebel that Naboth said, “I will not give you my vineyard.” Ahab left out the important part – that Naboth recognized that land as an inheritance from the Lord. He left out the fact that Numbers 27:8-11 made provision for the land to be passed only to the nearest relative, but it wasn't to be sold – it was the promised land - the inheritance given to the people of God. It wasn't his to trade or sell but that didn't matter to Ahab or Jezebel.

Verse 7 records Jezebel's response to Ahab's weakness. “Is this how you act as king over Israel?” Jezebel was the daughter of the king of Phoenicia (now Lebanon) and was accustomed to the actions of a dictator who could and would take whatever he wanted. She told Ahab she would get Naboth's vineyard for him and for him to get up, eat, cheer up.

In the ancient East the property of public criminals reverted to the crown so Jezebel

conspired to turn Naboth into a criminal. She wrote letters in Ahab's name to the elders of the city of Jezreel. She told them to proclaim a day of fasting, probably suggesting that there was a crisis in the city and they needed to fast and pray for God to reveal the source of the problem. Then they were to have two scoundrels lie and claim that Naboth was the problem, that he had cursed God and the king and then they were to condemn him for treason and blasphemy and stone him to death. Jezebel placed Ahab's royal seal on the letters (perhaps with his knowledge and approval) and sent them off to the elders and nobles who the bible said, "did as Jezebel directed in the letters she had written to them." They sent back word to Jezebel "Naboth has been stoned and is dead." (According to 2 Kings 9:26 Naboth's sons and heirs were killed also.)

When she received word that her orders had been carried out, she told Ahab to stop his pouting. Naboth is dead so go get your vineyard! Let's read the rest of the story now from v16-26.

Like a spoiled child, Ahab hurries to Naboth's vineyard next door, eager to take possession of his latest toy. He seems to have not even the slightest tinge of guilt or regret over what has happened. Imagine his surprise when Elijah walks in. It appears he hadn't seen Elijah since the confrontation on Mt. Carmel, perhaps two or three years before. He thought he was rid of Elijah and now, here he is. Elijah confronts the king, calling him a murderer and prophesying judgment upon him for his actions.

Surprisingly, Ahab repents and humbles himself before God (v27-29). Because he repented and humbled himself, God tempered his judgment somewhat. Nevertheless, Ahab's legacy was one of evil and wickedness. Notice verse 25 – **"There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife."** What a tragic legacy. With that said, let me make three observations about this story we've read today.

The world will never understand the actions of the godly. The unfortunate hero of this story is Naboth. Here is this little guy, an underdog, minding his own business, tending his vineyard, taking care of the land he inherited, the land God gave him, when suddenly he becomes the object of the king and the queen's wrath. They want him dead and actually the reason is because he refused to compromise and insisted on doing the right thing. He wouldn't sell because he didn't want to displease the Lord or by his actions despise the inheritance God had given to the children of Israel. He was doing the right thing, the godly thing and Ahab couldn't

understand.

He offers him money or a better and bigger vineyard, and Ahab can't imagine why Naboth wouldn't accept his offer. He couldn't understand because for Naboth, it wasn't about money or might, it was about obedience to God. It wasn't about property, it was about principle. It was about doing the right thing, even if it meant sacrifice, even if it meant passing up the opportunity to own a bigger and better vineyard. Naboth was determined to obey God and do what was right and Ahab and Jezebel could never understand that decision.

Can I tell you – the world will never understand the choices you make to obey God. The world won't understand why we, the church, takes the stand we do in opposition to abortion on demand. Why we take the stand we do in the support of traditional marriage, why we are against sexual immorality of all kinds and against those things that break up marriages and families.

The world won't understand why you refuse to compromise, why you won't cheat on your spouse, why you won't throw away your family, your values, your commitments, in order to advance your career or simply to please yourself. The world won't understand why you give 10% of your income, your tithe, to the Lord. The world won't understand the sacrifices you make to serve God and serve others. The world won't understand why you forgive instead of seeking revenge. The world can't understand the actions of a godly person so don't expect them to commend you for your effort or support you. They will laugh, mock, call you crazy, naive, stupid. They will oppose you, so determine in your heart you are going to obey God and do what is right regardless of the cost or the sacrifice involved. There are more important things in this life than money or possessions or bigger and better vineyards. There are more important things in this life than being powerful or winning all the battles. Naboth is the only one who triumphed in this story. He won, even though it cost him his life.

2. If you can be bought, the devil will meet your price. You've heard me say this many times over the years, but it is still the truth and you need to be aware of it everyday of your life. If you can be bought, the devil will absolutely meet your price.

When Elijah found Ahab in the vineyard, Ahab said, "So you have found me, my enemy!" And Elijah in essence said, "I haven't come looking for you because you are my enemy. You aren't my enemy, I'm here because you've made yourself an enemy of God by

selling yourself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord.” We quoted verse 25 earlier and it was that verse that the Lord used to grab my attention and begin to deal with my heart. **“There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord.”** He sold himself to do evil. May I say it one more time: If you can be bought, if there is a sale price on your life, in your soul, the devil will meet your price.

Ahab sold himself, he sold his soul, his future, his family, his relationship with God, his destiny, he sold everything...for what? Grapes? A vineyard? He sold himself to evil. One commentary said Ahab “sacrificed his principles to obtain what he wanted which included a comparatively worthless vineyard.” He sold himself to the devil for grapes! What is your price?

Jezebel sold herself for power, control, influence, wealth, position. She needed Ahab to be the king but it appears she was the power behind the throne. She wanted the power, the prestige and all that goes with it so she sold herself to do evil. What is your price? Will you sell yourself to do evil in exchange for power? Position? Prominence and influence? What is your price?

Students, what’s your price? Will you sell yourself to do evil in order to fit in? Would you sacrifice doing what is right and pleasing God in order to please some other crowd? Is being accepted by teammates or the other cheerleaders or band members or whatever club or crowd you are trying to impress, is it worth disobeying God? Is getting in that sorority or fraternity worth betraying yourself and your values? Is keeping that boyfriend or girlfriend worth compromising your standards and sinning against God? Is being accepted by “the crowd” worth selling yourself to do evil? If you can be bought, the devil will meet your price.

The city elders and nobles of Jezreel – they were in on this conspiracy to kill Naboth as well. They did the dirty work. They sold themselves to do evil in order to keep their jobs. They killed an innocent man just so Jezebel wouldn’t remove them from their positions. You wouldn’t kill someone to keep your job, but would you lie, cheat, use deceptive practices to make a sale? Would you sacrifice your principles to keep a job or to keep up an appearance? Would you lie about someone to cover yourself or your boss? What is your price? If you can be bought, the devil will meet your price.

You have to make up your mind and decide “I cannot be bought. I am going to serve

God and live my life according to his word. Nothing this world has to offer, nothing the devil has to offer is worth sacrificing my relationship with God. No price the devil can offer me is worth losing my soul and going to hell. Nothing anyone can tempt me with is worth losing my family, my integrity, my reputation, my good name, my self. I will not sell myself to anyone. I will not sell myself to do evil. Instead, I will give myself to God alone.” If you can be bought, the devil will meet your price.

3. **The cost of sin and disobedience is always greater than you think.** Ahab must have thought, “So what if I get caught. I’m the king. How bad can it be? So what if God is upset with me. How bad can it be? What could he do?” But it was much worse than he expected. Much worse than he thought.

You see, no one ever thinks they are going to get caught. Everyone thinks they can get by with it. Few consider the consequences and if they do, they think it only affects themselves. “So what if I cheat on my spouse. It’s my choice. It only affects me.” I said this last Sunday and let me say it again. Your sin doesn’t affect only you! It affects everyone around you, everyone that knows you, everyone that knows your spouse, everyone that knows the person you are cheating with. Hundreds of people are affected by your actions and your choices.

The cost of sin and disobedience is always greater than you think. It is always more far reaching than you think. Ahab thought it would only affect himself and Naboth but it affected so much more.

Elijah tells him just how far reaching his sin and its consequences would be. **“I am going to bring disaster on you. I will consume your descendants and cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel – slave or free...Dogs will devour Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel...Dogs will eat those belonging to Ahab who die in the city and the birds of the air will feed on those who die in the country.” 1 Kings 21:21-24**

Sin doesn’t just affect one person or two, it affects all. It affects the generations yet to come. Children and grandchildren are affected by your choices today. Think about what you are doing. Think about what you are about to do. The cost is always greater than you think.

Because Ahab repented and humbled himself, the Lord relented somewhat concerning him. The Lord told him that he would not see the disaster that would come upon his family but it would happen during his son’s lifetime.

Look at 2 Kings 9:24. Joram was Ahab's son. **“Jehu drew his bow and shot Joram between the shoulders. The arrow pierced his heart and he slumped down in his chariot. Jehu said to Bidkar, his chariot officer, ‘Pick him up and throw him on the field that belonged to Naboth the Jezreelite. Remember how you and I were riding together in chariots behind Ahab his father when the Lord made this prophecy about him: ‘Yesterday I saw the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons, declares the Lord, and I will surely make you pay for it on this plot of ground, declares the Lord.’ Now then, pick him up and throw him on that plot, in accordance with the word of the Lord.” 2 Kings 9:24-26.**

The cost of sin is always higher, always greater, always more far reaching than you think. Ahab paid, but so did his son.

2 Kings 9:30-37 tells of the death of Jezebel where the dogs ate her flesh. 2 Kings 10 tells of seventy sons of the house of Ahab – these were royal princes – and they were all killed, beheaded and their heads placed in baskets and stacked at the gates of the city of Jezreel. Look at 2 Kings 10:10-11. **“Know then that not a word the Lord has spoken against the house of Ahab will fail. The Lord has done what he promised through his servant Elijah. So Jehu killed everyone in Jezreel who remained of the house of Ahab, as well as all his chief men, his close friends and his priests, leaving him no survivor.” 2 Kings 10:10-11.** May I say it one more time: the cost of sin and disobedience is always greater than you think.

All of this pain, all of this death and destruction, Ahab left with no survivors, his family all gone, all over a bunch of grapes? I realize it is not really that simple. There was much more sin and idolatry and wickedness than this one thing. But when it comes down to it, he sold his soul, he sold himself to do evil, for nothing more than the equivalent of a handful of grapes. What are you selling yourself for? Who are you selling yourself to?

What's your price? Grapes? “Well that would be silly wouldn't it? To throw your kingdom away over a handful of grapes and a little vineyard?” It is silly, but I've known people who threw their marriage and family away over the pixels on a computer screen. They threw their family away for images that aren't even real.

What's your price? Are you going to sell yourself to do evil, to sin, to please yourself, or will you sell out to God? The choice is yours. Ahab didn't have to make the choices he made. Neither do you. You can make a new choice today. You can give yourself to the Lord. You can choose to stand for what is right, like Naboth. It may cost you, but Jesus said, **“...whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good**

will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" Matthew 16:25-26 What's your price?