

LESSONS

1st Lesson: 1 Kings 21: 1-21, 27-29

1. And it came to pass after these things that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which was in Jezreel, next to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. 2. So Ahab spoke to Naboth, saying, "Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near, next to my house; and for it I will give you a vineyard better than it. Or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its worth in money." 3. But Naboth said to Ahab, "The Lord forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you." 4. So Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." And he lay down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no food. 5. But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said to him, "Why is your spirit so sullen that you eat no food?" 6. He said to her, "Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite, and said to him, 'Give me your vineyard for money; or else, if it pleases you, I will give you another vineyard for it.' And he answered, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'" 7. Then Jezebel his wife said to him, "You now exercise authority over Israel! Arise, eat food, and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." 8. And she wrote letters in Ahab's name, sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters to the elders and the nobles who were dwelling in the city with Naboth. 9. She wrote in the letters, saying, "Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth with high honor among the people; 10. and seat two men, scoundrels, before him to bear witness against him, saying, 'You have blasphemed God and the king.' Then take him out, and stone him, that he may die." 11. So the men of his city, the elders and nobles who were inhabitants of his city, did as Jezebel had sent to them, as it was written in the letters which she had sent to them. 12. They proclaimed a fast, and seated Naboth with high honor among the people. 13. And two men, scoundrels, came in and sat before him; and the scoundrels witnessed against him, against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, "Naboth has blasphemed God and the king!" Then they took him outside the city and stoned him with stones, so that he died. 14. Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, "Naboth has been stoned and is dead." 15. And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead." 16. So it was, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab got up and went down to take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite. 17. Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 18. "Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who lives in Samaria. There he is, in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone down to take possession of it. 19. You shall speak to him, saying, '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 dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours."'" 20. So Ahab said to Elijah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" And he answered, "I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the Lord: 21. 'Behold, I will bring calamity on you. I will take away your posterity, and will cut off from Ahab every male in Israel, both bond and free. 27. So it was, when Ahab heard

those words, that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning. 28. And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 29. "See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days. In the days of his son I will bring the calamity on his house."

2nd Lesson: Matthew 21: 33-46

33. Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. 34. Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. 35. And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. 36. Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. 37. Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son." 38. But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, "This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance." 39. So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. 40. Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?" 41. They said to Him, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons. 42. Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes"? 43. Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. 44. And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder." 45. Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them. 46. But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet.

3rd Lesson: Arcana Coelestia 9014: 3

The Lord forgives everyone his sins, because He is mercy itself. Nevertheless they are not thereby forgiven unless the man performs serious repentance, and desists from evils, and afterward lives a life of faith and charity, and this even to the end of his life. When this is done, the man receives from the Lord spiritual life, which is called new life. When from this new life the man views the evils of his former life, and turns away from them, and regards them with horror, then for the first time are the evils forgiven, for then the man is held in truths and goods by the Lord, and is withheld from evils.

S E R M O N

Ahab's Remorse

A Sermon

By

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So it was, when Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning. And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, "See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me?" 1 Kings 21: 27-29

We know very well how the Lord wants us to live. Most of us are familiar with the Ten Commandments, the Lord's teachings spoken during the Sermon on the Mount, and the wonderful truths He has revealed in the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Jerusalem. Who among us does not have some inkling of what the Lord requires?

A certain ruler asked the Lord, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And likewise what shall we do? The Lord said to the ruler and to people today, "You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother'" (Luke 18: 12-20).

Unfortunately, humans incline toward disobedience of the Lord. For example, Pharaoh refused to yield to the Lord, saying to Moses, "who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go" (Exodus 5:2). Even Solomon, in all his glory turned his heart after other gods, built high places for idolatrous worship, and did evil in the sight of the Lord (1 Kings 11: 4-8). And finally, the prophet Jonah refused to deliver the Lord's message to Ninevah but instead fled to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord (Jonah 1: 1-3).

Still on the other hand, people are not all bad all the time. It is true that quite frequently people can be obedient and humble themselves before the Lord. Consider how Daniel refused to bow down to the king but "in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, [Daniel] knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days" (Daniel 6: 10). In Samaria the Lord sent ten lepers to show themselves to the priests. As they went they were cleansed but "one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks (Luke 17: 15-16). Daniel and the one returning leper can be descriptive of us when we are reverent and faithful to the Lord.

Like choosing which path to take at a fork in the road we must make choices. We may humble ourselves before the Lord. As the heavenly life He prescribes is within our reach (with His help), we may step forward knowing all the while that our strength is from the

Lord alone. On the other hand, as the Lord leaves us in freedom, we may disregard His Word; but then that could cause us to languish in disappointment for not getting our way.

Let's now consider how Ahab reacted when he did not get his way. Ahab wanted Naboth's vineyard but went away displeased when Naboth would not give it to him. Ahab went to lay down on his bed and would not eat any food – he was mourning. Ahab then listened to Jezebel who, by means of false witnesses, stealing, and murder, made it possible for Ahab to take the vineyard.

But let's compare how Ahab reacted later. Even though he was displeased with Naboth's refusal to hand over his vineyard, Ahab seems to have experienced a change of heart. When Elijah the prophet confronted him, Ahab "tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning." So, at first Ahab mourned over not getting his way when Naboth refused to hand over his vineyard. Then later he mourned when it was brought to his attention that he had sinned.

Naboth owned a vineyard that he had inherited from his fathers. The Heavenly Doctrine teaches that a vineyard represents the church and all the spiritual things of the church (AR 132). We can also know from the Word that the church is from the Lord (AC 4286:7, AR 918) and "the Lord is the church with those who acknowledge Him alone as the God of heaven and earth, and believe in Him" (TCR 608).

As the church is from the Lord and is the Lord, it is in the church where we find His Word. The Word is clear that the church is the Lord's kingdom here on earth (AC 4638, AC 6637). Because the church is where the Word is we can learn the Lord's truths and allow them to shape our faith and lead us to the good of life. It is coming into the Lord's church that we may receive the Lord's salvation. The hope is that we love and cherish the Lord's church.

Interestingly, Ahab coveted Naboth's vineyard. It seems that desiring to have the church is something good for a person to do. But it is important to note why Ahab wanted Naboth's vineyard: he wanted to convert the vineyard into a vegetable garden. A more accurate translation would be a garden of herbs. The Lord says in His Word that herbs are truths on the natural level (AC 996).

To shed more light on the subject let's examine some passages in the Word. The Arcana tells us that "all things in the earth, even those in its vegetable kingdom, correspond to spiritual things that are in heaven (AC 10669:3). Every vegetable there [in heaven] represents a form of use (AE 1214:4). In Heaven And Hell we learn that a garden "corresponds to intelligence and wisdom" (HH 111). Since there are vegetables of all kinds, we may therefore conclude that a vegetable garden, or garden of herbs, would symbolize the wonderful varieties of good loves and the light-shining truths by which a person lives a good life in performing heavenly uses.

But this is not the case with Ahab. Converting the vineyard or the church into a vegetable garden was not something good. This may be understood when we consider

the context in which these events transpired. Ahab was not a good king. He “did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him” (1 Kings 16:30). We may also consider the Heavenly Doctrine that says “all things which exist in earth’s three kingdoms - the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms - serve to mean spiritual and celestial realities, or else their opposites” (AC 10178).

While “vegetables” “herbs” and a “garden” can have a good representation, here with Ahab that is not the case. Ahab pictures a person who subjects the church to his own intelligence. This can symbolize a person refashioning the church into something the person wants instead of what the Lord desires.

Reshaping the church to suit own desires may have various consequences, one of which could be mourning. Ahab went to lay down on his bed and refused to eat when Naboth did not turn over his vineyard. This scenario can symbolize a person’s mourning or discomfort with the church, and all it stands for, when he wants to do wrong. Something that is wrong may be analyzed and even viewed from several different angles. But somehow no matter how much a person engages in this type of analysis, something that is simply wrong just does not fit within the framework of the church the Lord has given us.

Often when we want to do wrong we may find ourselves irritated or a little bothered by the Word. We could feel agitation that the Word within us is reminding us to shun evil and, like a beacon, is sounding an alarm. But as long as anyone is committed to doing something wrong there is no rest. Consider this idea from the Arcana: “when evil is unable to do harm to good, which evil is always trying to do, it first of all feels annoyed and afterwards erupts into anger” (AC 10618:2).

In the case of Ahab and Jezebel, evil erupted into more than anger; it escalated to bearing false witness, stealing, and eventually murder. As the story goes, Jezebel wrote a letter in the king’s name instructing the elders as follows: proclaim a fast; seat Naboth among the people; and have two scoundrels say he blasphemed God and the king; and then take him out and stone him. The stage was set and the elders did as Jezebel set forth in the letter. Naboth was stoned and he died. After these events Ahab arose and took possession of Naboth’s vineyard.

Ahab coveted Naboth’s vineyard. To covet is simply the desire to take the possessions of another. Coveting is a secret sin since it is not possible to know that any given person entertains desires and thoughts to take the possessions of others. So, coveting can be private and concealed over. In that case it may seem harmless. However, coveting can lead to other evils. Ahab filled his heart with the sin of covetousness. Now remember the Lord said “out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man” (Matthew 15: 19-20). We should not be surprised that from Ahab’s coveting flowed forth lying, stealing, and murder.

So now let's turn to the Heavenly Doctrine for a deeper meaning of false witness, stealing, and murder. In His Word the Lord explains that the false witness committed against Naboth means falsification of truth and the adulteration of good (AE 160:2). Taking Naboth's vineyard and killing him signifies destroying the Church (AR 132).

First, what is falsification of truth? The Arcana says "falsification of truth takes place if a person leads an evil life while acknowledging truths received through religious teachings, for the truths then have evil inside them, and evil falsifies truth; evil dispels from truths what is heavenly and Divine, and introduces what is hellish, as a consequence of which falsification takes place" (AC 10648:2).

Second, what is adulteration of good? Adulteration of good relates to good which is contaminated or perverted (AC 4601, AC 2466:9). A person can "adulterate forms of good by attaching them to their own selfish loves" (AC 10307:3). In other words, doing good in a way that favors a person's own loves, such as honor, reputation, or gain, contaminates the good with evil loves such as love of self or the world.

The critical problem with falsification of truth and adulteration of good is that the mixture is all wrong. Living an evil life and acknowledging truth (falsification of truth) do not belong together. Likewise doing good from love of self or the world (adulteration of good) and doing good from love of the Lord and the neighbor do not belong together. False witness against Naboth and then stealing his vineyard and murdering him speaks about how we should not mix good and evil.

A deeper spiritual reality is we must not mix the things of the church (vineyard) with our own selfish loves and thoughts because the Lord's church with us will be destroyed. This is like bearing false witness against Naboth, having him murdered and then taking his vineyard (the church) and converting it into a garden of herbs (or something that suits our own evil loves and thoughts).

Nonetheless should our footsteps veer from the pathway to heaven the Lord is forever merciful. The Lord commanded Elijah to speak thus to Ahab, "have you murdered and also taken possession?" Elijah eventually confronted Ahab saying, "I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the Lord." The Lord sent Elijah the prophet to Ahab so that Ahab could see his own evil that he had committed. We can know that living within the literal sense are words of eternal life. The Heavenly Doctrine teaches that Elijah represents the Lord as to the Word (AC 9198:5). Therefore, Elijah confronting Ahab is an image of the Lord speaking with us in His Word to stir up within us remembrance of His truths and the life we must live.

We see in our second lesson that the Lord asked the chief priests and Pharisees what they thought the landowner would do to those wicked vinedressers. They said to Him, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons" (Matthew 21: 40-41). By means of a parable the Lord showed the chief priests and Pharisees the sin of other people, the

wicked vinedressers in the parable. That way, without the bias of self-interest, the chief priests and Pharisees could see evil for what it really is.

It is easy to be judgmental when examining the behavior of another person. In the True Christian Religion the Lord says “anyone can find fault with another for his evil intentions and say, ‘do not do that because it is a sin’ and yet find it difficult to say this to himself” (TCR 535). This makes it all the more important why the Lord also says in the Arcana “let everyone examine himself by this [whether he intends evil or good to his neighbor] in order to learn what he is” (AC 1680:2). According to the Divine Providence, engaging in self-examination is very important because “every evil that is not seen nourishes itself” (DP 278:5).

The parable of wicked vinedressers served as the means whereby the Lord revealed to the chief priests and Pharisees something about themselves. Upon realizing that something evil about them had been exposed, in the presence of the people who had gathered in the temple, the chief priests and the Pharisees sought to lay hands on the Lord. However, as we compare how Ahab reacted to Elijah we see that Ahab “tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning.”

When Ahab saw Elijah after there had been three years of drought, Ahab referred to him as “O troubler of Israel” (18: 17). Then when the Lord sent Elijah to ask Ahab “have you murdered and also taken possession” Ahab addressed the prophet as “O my enemy.” Even so, Ahab “tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning.” Earlier when Naboth refused to hand over his vineyard Ahab was sullen, displeased, went to lay down on his bed and would not eat any food. Ahab mourned over Naboth’s refusal. But when he is confronted by Elijah, Ahab again mourns but this time he mourns as if he’s had a change of heart.

We learn from the Heavenly Doctrine that tearing of garments signifies “grief because the truths of the church are hurt” and “rent asunder by falsities” such that there’s “mourning on account of lost truth” In order for a person to grieve over having committed some sin there has to be a change of heart. A change of heart may come about from repentance. Repentance is possible by humbleness before the Lord and confession. So, Ahab’s mourning can symbolize how we should react when our own sin is brought to our attention. We must humble ourselves before the Lord and repent. Then we make it possible for the Lord to forgive us.

Because Ahab humbled himself the Lord said “see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days.” Again, we must be willing to humble ourselves before the Lord and repent in order that we may be forgiven. The Lord teaches in the Arcana that sins “are not thereby forgiven unless the man performs serious repentance, and desists from evils, and afterward lives a life of faith and charity” (AC 9014:3).

The Lord’s Word is a wonderful repository of truths that, if obeyed, can lead us to heaven. Yet we must be vigilant and cautious that we do not deceive ourselves by

reshaping the Lord's Word to suit our own desires. We are susceptible to giving in to sinful desires and thoughts and as a consequence contaminate the Lord's church He is building within us. Should we discover we have veered from the path of salvation we must humble ourselves before the Lord so He may redirect our footsteps. He will heal our discomfort and revive us again.

“Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin...For why should you die O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies” says the Lord God. “Therefore turn and live.” Ezekiel 18: 30-32

Amen.