

Israel's Troubler vs. The Inescapable Word (Part 2)

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- [0 : 00] We're going to be this evening in 1 Kings chapter 21, and perhaps you'd like to turn there with me now. We're going to read together this passage that Phil Copeland is going to be preaching from.
- We've been following the story of, well, the sad spiral of decline in the kingship in Israel. Kings seem to go from bad to worse, and with Ahab, we've come to one of the very worst.
- And tonight is a sad and salutary tale, and yet, in the midst of all of it, an extraordinary reminder of the great mercy, the depths of the mercy of our God.
- So we're going to read 1 Kings chapter 21 together. And you'll see that the last verse of chapter 20 shows Ahab going home to his house vexed and sullen.
- Now Naboth, the Jezreelite, had a vineyard in Jezreel beside the palace of Ahab, king of Samaria. And after this, Ahab said to Naboth, give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it's near my house.
- [1 : 13] And I'll give you a better vineyard for it. Or if it seems good to you, I'll give you its value in money. But Naboth said to Ahab, the Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.
- And Ahab went into his house, vexed and sullen because of what Naboth, the Jezreelite, had said to him. For he had said, I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.
- And he laid that on his bed, turned away his face, and would eat no food. But Jezebel, his wife, came to him and said to him, Why is your spirit so vexed that you eat no food?
- And 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 please you, I'll give you another vineyard for it. And he answered, I will not give you my vineyard.
- And Jezebel, his wife, said to him, Do you now govern Israel? Arise and eat bread, and let your heart be cheerful. I will give you the vineyard of Naboth, the Jezreelite.
- [2 : 24] So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal. And she sent the letters to the elders and the leaders who lived with Naboth in his city.
- And she wrote in the letters, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth at the head of his people. And set two worthless men opposite him, and let them bring a charge against him, saying, You've cursed God and the king, and then take him out and stone him to death.
- And the men of his city, the elders and the leaders who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them, as it was written in the letters that she had sent to them.
- They proclaimed a fast, and set Naboth at the head of the people. And the two worthless men came in, sat opposite him. And the worthless men brought a charge against Naboth in the presence of the people, saying, Naboth cursed God and the king.
- So they took him outside the city, and stoned him to death with stones. And then they sent to Jezebel, saying, Naboth has been stoned, he's dead.

[3 : 31] As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, 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. And as soon as Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab arose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite to take possession of it.

Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who's in Samaria.

Behold, he's in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone to take possession. And you shall say to him, thus says the Lord, have you killed and also taken possession?

And you shall say to him, thus says the Lord, in the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick up your own blood. Ahab said to Elijah, have you found me, O my enemy?

[4 : 41] He answered, I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord. Behold, I will bring disaster upon you.

I will utterly burn you up and will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free in Israel. And I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, and like the house of Basha, the son of Ahijah, for the anger to which you have provoked me, and because you have made Israel to sin.

And of Jezebel the Lord also said, the dogs shall eat Jezebel within the walls of Jezreel. Anyone belonging to Ahab who dies in the city, the dogs shall eat.

And anyone of his who dies in the open country, the birds of the heaven shall eat. There was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the Lord, like Ahab, whom Jezebel, his wife, incited.

He acted very abominably in going after idols as the Amorites had done, whom the Lord cast out before the people of Israel. And when Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went about dejectedly.

[6 : 11] And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me?

Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days, but in his son's days, I'll bring the disaster upon his house.

Amen. May God bless to us his word, solemn as it is. Well, please do have your Bibles open to 1 Kings 21, which we read together.

We live in a world where injustice is rife.

In a world where so often, those who are in positions of authority abuse the power that they have to get what they want. How are we, the church, to live in such a world?

[7 : 25] And what does the Lord our God think of those who carry out such vile injustice? What is his response to those who carry out such evil to his people?

1 Kings 21 has the answer to all of these questions. Remember, we're at the final section of 1 Kings, chapters 20 to 22. And in this section, the author has placed three similar episodes together.

And in each of these episodes, King Ahab, the man labeled rightly the troubler of Israel, comes up against the inescapable word of the Lord.

And last week, last Sunday in chapter 20, we saw that the Lord shows Ahab wondrous grace. And yet Ahab spurns that grace.

And he shows that he spurns that grace by his rejection of the Lord's word. And so the Lord announced just judgment upon the king. And as we come into chapter 21, therefore, we expect to read of the Lord bringing that judgment upon Ahab.

[8 : 34] And yet, not for the first time in the book, the Lord delays judgment yet again, giving Ahab yet another chance to repent. And sadly, that is not what we find the king doing in chapter 21.

Let's look at the chapter under four points. Firstly, verses 1 to 16, the Lord's people may suffer vile injustice.

Vile injustice. In verse 1, we are introduced to this man called Naboth Naboth from Jezreel. Jezreel was located some 20 miles north of the capital city, Samaria, at the time.

And in Jezreel, Naboth, we're told, owns a vineyard. And it's located right next to King Ahab's palace. We know from earlier in the book that Ahab's main residence was in Samaria.

But he has, as usual, typical with other kings of the day, a second palace in Jezreel. And in verse 2, Ahab comes to this Naboth and he makes him an offer.

[9 : 44] He says, Give me your vineyard that I may have it for a vegetable garden because it is near my house. And I will give you a better vineyard for it or if it seems good to you, I will give you its value in money.

And in verse 3, having heard that offer, that seemingly generous offer, Naboth replies, No way. What does he say? The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.

Naboth wants nothing to do with this offer because he values his family's share in the promised land. It means more than anything to him. And what it stands for, more than riches, more than wealth, more than having a good standing with the king.

You see, friends, back then, a family's inheritance, their portion, or lot within the promised land, it held massive significance. It was so much more than just a patch of farming ground.

It carried with it a share of all the blessings of the covenant God made with Abraham. to have that piece of land meant to share in those blessings.

[10 : 59] And to be deprived of it would result in the loss of those blessings. And in the New Testament, this language of inheritance shifts up a key and becomes shorthand for a share in the new creation.

So you can see why Naboth doesn't want to part with his vineyard. This is not just a vineyard. This is his share in the promised land. that is of the utmost importance to him.

And also notice in his reply, Naboth is actually saying that whilst his family technically owned the vineyard, the land actually belongs to the Lord God himself.

Naboth should not permanently sell off his vineyard because he would fundamentally have to give an account to the Lord for his careless abandonment of what the Lord had graciously given his family.

And friends, this was actually all spelled out in the law earlier on in the scriptures. You can read about it in Leviticus 25 or Numbers 36. The Lord told his people, the land is mine.

[12 : 04] It belongs to me. And yet graciously, I have allowed you to live here. I've given it over to you. And then the Lord commands his people not to permanently sell off their share of the land to anyone.

Don't do that. Now, of course, there might be times when an Israelite sinks down into poverty and they could sell the land that they have off for money to survive, but the transfer of their land would only be for a limited time.

Any land bought off an Israelite was to be handed back over to the rightful owner at the next year of Jubilee. But it is clear from this passage that Naboth is not in poverty.

And so if he sold off his land, he would be rebelling against the Lord's law. And Naboth doesn't want to do that because he is a real believer. He's a real believer.

He loves the Lord and he wants to remain covenantally faithful to the Lord. Now, just look at Ahab's response. This reveals what was really going on in Ahab's heart.

[13 : 11] Verse 4, And Ahab went into his house vexed and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said to him.

For he had said, I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers. In other words, Ahab was not a man of faith. He doesn't see this inheritance.

He doesn't see what the Lord promised this land signified. He just sees another vineyard. His heart is rooted in the things of this world. And because Naboth chose to walk by the obedience of faith, he is full of hatred for Naboth.

And by the way, just notice, to see the word in verse 4, vexed and sullen, it doesn't do the Hebrew justice. It's the same two words used back at the end of chapter 20, verse 43.

When Ahab stormed away after hearing the Lord's announcement of judgment upon him, it should be really translated as Ahab stormed away to his house, rebellious, hard-hearted, furious.

[14 : 15] Such was his hatred of the Lord and the Lord's servant, Naboth. And at the end of verse 4, Ahab's behavior is, quite frankly, embarrassing.

Is it not? Embarrassing. He behaves like a spoiled toddler. My eight-year-old son behaves better than this. He's throwing a strop because he hasn't been able to get what he wants.

He storms off to his bedroom, the royal bedroom. He slumps down on his bed, face to the wall, not looking at anyone, and he refuses to eat his tea, his dinner. He is lying there, rebellious and furious.

He spat the dummy. And in verse 5, his wife Jezebel walks in and says, what's wrong with you? What's wrong with you? And in verse 6, he tells her, because I spoke to Naboth, the Jezreelite, and said to him, give me your vineyard for money, or else if it please you, I will give you another vineyard for it.

He answered, I will not give you my vineyard. And just notice in that little summary, again, Ahab doesn't mention anything about the fact that this vineyard was Naboth's inheritance.

[15 : 25] It means nothing to him. He couldn't care less about the Lord's covenant promises. It's just a vineyard to him. Well, having listened to her husband's whinging, Jezebel is not impressed.

And in verse 7, she gives her husband a great good tongue lashing. She says, Do you now govern Israel? Arise, eat bread, and be cheerful. I, and it's emphatic in the Hebrew, I will sort this out.

I will get you the vineyard of Naboth, the Jezreelite. In other words, she's saying, Oh, come on. You're supposed to be king here of this land. Not a stroppy wimp.

Go, go on, eat and cheer up. I'll sort this out for you. No local grape farmer is going to resist our regime. And so Jezebel kicks into action with this plan that can only be described as devious, fiendish, seriously wicked.

In verse 8, pretending to be Ahab, using his official royal seal and his royal letterheads, she writes letters to the local elders of Naboth's home city, Jezreel.

[16 : 41] And these letters contain clear instructions for the men to follow. Verse 9, proclaim a fast in the city. And at that time, it's obvious that all the people of the city would gather together.

And when they're all gathered together, give Naboth a prominent seat up the front in full view of everyone, where everyone can see him. And in verse 10, get two worthless men, the Hebrew is literally sons of destruction, two lowlifes, two thugs, and sit them down directly opposite Naboth.

And at some point in the proceedings, these two lowlifes have to stand up and publicly announce that they've just heard Naboth uttering blasphemy against God and against the king.

And they are to then immediately take Naboth outside and they are to stone him to death outside of the city. Kill him. Murder him. And friends, in verse 12 to 14, the leaders of Jezreel carry the plan out perfectly.

In verse 12, a fast is proclaimed. The elders call for this day of prayer. It all looked very religious. It's injustice, but it's very religious-looking injustice.

[17 : 57] Naboth is given that prominent seat up the front so everyone can see. The two worthless men are brought in and sat down. And at some point, they burst out and say, this man has blasphemed against God.

And spoken against the king, he is guilty. We are both witnesses of this. And with that, they take this Naboth, this faithful believer who's done nothing wrong outside of the building, outside of the city, and they stone him to death for a crime he did not commit.

Naboth, this man of faith, this real believer who loved the Lord, he is murdered. And let me say to, by the way, any of the public there at the time looking on, all of this would have looked perfectly legit and legal.

You see, back then, the law stated that if you were to bring a charge of blasphemy or any charge against someone, how many witnesses did you need? Two. And also, what was the charge, the punishment for blaspheming God?

Stoning by death outside of the city. It all looked very legal. It all looked very legit. It goes to show you just how devious and deceptive Jezebel is.

[19 : 14] And devilish, actually. She twists God's good law, abuses it, and uses it to bring about this wicked injustice. And friends, don't turn to it now, but later, when you go home, maybe you could read 2 Kings chapter 9.

And in 2 Kings chapter 9, we are told that also at this point, Jezebel had Naboth's sons liquidated as well. They were killed in order to make sure that the vineyard was free from the family line.

No more in the line of Naboth to inherit the land, this vineyard. And in verse 15, with Naboth and his sons out of the picture, all seems peachy and rosy for Jezebel.

Her plan has succeeded, so she thinks. She says to Ahab, arise, get up, take possession of the vineyard. It's just a vineyard. of Naboth, the Jezreelite.

And as usual, in verse 16, Ahab just does what his wife tells him. He asks no questions, makes no comments, doesn't make any inquiries, so tell me exactly, my wife, how is it that Naboth is no longer here with us?

[20 : 28] None of that. He doesn't care. He simply goes and he takes possession of this inheritance, which is not his. And the Hebrew word for take possession there is the same language used to describe the taking of the promised land at the conquest.

Now, friends, let me just say, we are not to read this and think, this is dreadful. But you know what? I'm so thankful that this could never happen to the Lord's people today. No, friends, this is something that the people of the Lord in every age may face from the world around us.

You find this message proclaimed all over the New Testament, there are many places we could turn to. But just think of 1 Peter, for example, that we studied not so long ago in our growth groups. What does the apostle say to the church?

He says, Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you.

And that's one of the key points here in 1 Kings 21. Don't be surprised if you as a believer suffer this kind of injustice. It can, and it does happen to the church today.

[21 : 47] And also, don't be surprised if you receive this kind of injustice from the hands of those who are ruling over you, the government. In 1 Kings 21, the injustice came from a passive king and an active queen.

In Daniel chapter 3, it will come from the king of Babylon. In Daniel chapter 6, it will come from the government and civil magistrates of Medo-Persia. Carry on through the rest of the Bible, through the rest of history, and you'll see the same thing happening again and again.

God's people suffering injustice, and it's all come from those who have been ruling over them, the authority of the day. So friends, it is true, the Bible says that we, the church, are ordinarily to submit to the government when they are ruling rightly.

We are also commanded to pray for those who have been entrusted with positions of power over us. But friends, passages like this also give us a healthy realism, and also encourage us and warn us that we must have a healthy wariness about those in power.

The government is never neutral. Just remember that. And if we ever find ourselves suffering violent injustice from the world or from those who rule over us, then we must remember, friends, that there is actually one greater than Naboth who understands fully what we are facing.

[23 : 21] Throughout verses 8 to 14, you just cannot help when you look at the passage carefully, you cannot help but notice glimpse after glimpse of the one who centuries later would stand in Naboth's position.

As Matthew 26 says, Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus, that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward, and at last two witnesses came forward and said, two witnesses, Jesus walked where Naboth walked.

He too was the victim of vile injustice. He too was falsely accused of blasphemy and speaking against the rulers of his day, Caesar. And like Naboth, he too was put to death outside of the city.

And so today, friends, if we ever face this sort of treatment, we might not, but we might well, then we must remember that you and I, we have a high priest in heaven who is able to sympathize with us fully, for he knows what it is to suffer the most vile injustice ever committed in history.

When we, his church, suffer injustice, we do not do so in isolation. As one writer puts it, the Christ who shared a Naboth suffering is surely united to you in yours.

[24 : 59] So, friends, remember, that's our first point this evening. Before we move on in the narrative, I just want us to go back, though, and look at verse 8 to 14 again. And that brings us to our second point this evening.

The Lord's people must be ready to stand for justice. The Lord's people must be ready to stand for justice. Friends, notice, please, that in 8 to 14, they are disturbing verses because of Jezebel's plan, but that's not the only reason they're disturbing.

Just look at verse 11. And the men of this city, Naboth city, the elders and the leaders who lived in his city, dead as Jezebel had sent word to them, as it was written in the letters that she had sent to them.

Friends, no one spoke out against this murderous scheme. No one, none of the leading men of the city, refused to go along with Jezebel's plan.

Not one of them exposed the evil that was laid out in the letter. They all complied. They all went, yes, yes, your majesty. And afterwards, they kept silent about it.

[26 : 15] They kept it hushed up. One writer says this, the author depicts these men so negatively for their slobbering subservience to Jezebel's wishes.

The local magistrates should have stood their ground and instead, like bureaucratic robots, they played right along. Now, friends, why did these men not show some spine and take a stand?

Well, friends, look, we're not told explicitly. We aren't. But given the context of the chapter and knowing what we know about Ahab's regime, it is surely most likely that these men were not prepared to pay the price for standing for justice.

These men were not prepared to pay the price and they wanted to protect their own lives, their own status and their own comfort. Instead of fearing the Lord, it seems they feared Ahab, or more specifically, Ahab's wife.

We know from earlier in the book that everyone would have known about the wrath of Jezebel and her love for killing. She loved to kill, especially those who loved the Lord and His word.

[27 : 25] And the big lesson of the conduct of these men in the living is surely this. Injustice flourishes not only by weakness, sorry, not only by wickedness, but also by weakness.

Not merely from a lack of goodness, but a lack of guts. And that remains true today in our time, in our nation, and in our city. Injustice will continue to flourish unless people speak out against it and stand against it.

And friends, as the people of God today, as the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, that is actually a key part of God's ministry that He's entrusted to us. Listen to James Phillip on this point.

This is a, it's not a short quote, but I want to read it to you. Listen to what he says. There is a certain temper of mind that would advocate silent submission to such acts of injustice in the belief that is in line with the New Testament's teaching to turn the other cheek.

But that is to misunderstand the Lord's words. It is one thing meekly to submit to evil when it is done to you and quite another when it is done to innocent people around you.

[28 : 43] One of the God-given tasks of the church in its prophetic ministry is to fearlessly rebuke and challenge evil things in our society and to expose them and call them by their proper names.

So brothers and sisters, as individuals and as a church, let's learn from the disastrous behavior of the men of Jezreel. Let's pray that the Lord will help us to fear Him more than fearing man and women and ruling authority so that we will not shirk away from speaking God's truth in love and in boldness to the dark and lost society that surrounds us, even if it's costly for us, even if it's unpleasant.

May the Spirit of Christ within us help us as a church family to have nothing to do with the works of darkness, but instead to expose them in our nation. And at the same time as we do that, may we compassionately and really compassionately call the nation to repent and believe the gospel.

That's one of the reasons why you are here. It's one of the reasons why you've been saved by Jesus. To proclaim the truth and point people to the one who can forgive them, the one who can renew them, the one whom if they follow Him, they will find the way of true human flourishing.

It might be costly, but it's what the Lord wants us to do. Well, thirdly, third point, from verse 17 to 24, we see the Lord intervenes to bring justice to His suffering people.

[30 : 26] The Lord intervenes to bring justice to His suffering people. So the end of verse 16, it all looks like the perfect crime has been committed.

Ahab is walking around his lovely new vineyard, soon to be vegetable patch. All was peaceful and pleasant. As he inspected his new premises, he no doubt felt quite pleased, but it wouldn't stay that way for long.

Please look at verse 17. Then the word of the Lord, that thing that Ahab cannot escape, it comes again and again and again to him.

The word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Arise, go down to meet Ahab, king of Israel, who is in Samaria. Behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone to take possession.

Friends, the injustice that Naboth suffered may well have been hidden from most of the people in the land, but it didn't go unnoticed by the Lord.

[31 : 32] For he is the living God who hears all, sees all, and who sovereignly knows all. Nothing can be hidden from him. He knows exactly what's been done to his suffering servant, Naboth, and so he sends this prophet Elijah to speak his all-powerful word to confront the king.

And in verse 19, we hear the message that Elijah is sent to deliver, and it is not easy reading. Please look at verse 19. Thus says the Lord, Have you Ahab killed and also taken possession?

And you shall say to him, Thus says the Lord, in the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, that is in the place outside of the city, so shall dogs lick up your own blood.

And suddenly in verse 20, we find ourselves in the vineyard with Elijah and Ahab together. And it might not be obvious from our English translations, but in Hebrew, at the start of verse 20, we're supposed to see that Elijah, he's already passed on the message, the devastating message of verse 19.

That's the first thing he says to the king as he's walking around peacefully in his vineyard. This announcement of judgment comes upon him. And come back next Sunday evening, friends, when God willing, we'll look at the fulfillment of this chilling word in chapter 22, when Ahab will meet his end.

[33 : 02] But in verse 20, Ahab responds to Elijah just like he did back in chapter 18. But remember, Ahab actually looked at Elijah and says, you come to cause me trouble.

You're always causing me trouble. Well, look what he says here. He says, have you found me, O my enemy? All these years and he's still unchanged.

He still despises the word of the Lord. And in response, Elijah says, oh yes, I've found you. Because you've sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord.

In other words, Ahab, I have found you because no one can escape the scrutiny and the judgment of the word of God. You have willfully enslaved yourself to sin.

You've sold yourself to sin. You have done this. You are fully responsible for what you've done in the Lord's sight. And time's up. And the prophet then announces more judgment from the Lord.

[34 : 03] Verse 21, he says, behold, I will bring disaster upon you. I will utterly burn you up and will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free in Israel.

Verse 22, the Lord promises to make Ahab's house like the house of two previous Israelite kings, Jeroboam and Bashar. We looked at them earlier in the book.

The Lord wiped these houses away. Not just the buildings, but actually the family line. Gone. Well, so too with Ahab's house.

Now, some might think, why is the Lord announcing this on Ahab? Surely, it was Jezebel. Well, the Lord will deal with her in a minute. She will receive a word of judgment too.

But let's be clear on this, friends. Ahab was responsible for what happened to Naboth. It was Ahab's greedy and covetous desire that kicked off this whole chain of events that culminated in the death of this faithful man's murder.

[35 : 11] At no point did he ever stop his wife and say, how are you going to get rid of Naboth? How are you going to do that? At no point did he ever ask or find out after he'd heard that Naboth had been taken away how that had come about.

He wasn't interested. He didn't care about justice. And as king over Israel, he was fully responsible for what happened in his household.

And as verse 22 says, just run your eye over verse 22, his wicked desire for that vineyard, it actually led to the whole nation of Israel to share in his sin.

As the king, as the federal head of the people, what he had done was shared amongst the whole nation. And so the judgments that the Lord announced here upon Ahab, friends, they are just, they are fair, they are right, and they are befitting the crimes that he has committed.

Naboth's sons have been wiped out, so too will Ahab's. And what about Jezebel? Well, she too will die the most shameful death.

[36 : 24] Look at verse 23. And of Jezebel, the Lord also said, the dogs shall eat Jezebel within the walls of Jezreel. Anyone belonging to Ahab who dies in the city, the dogs shall eat.

And anyone of his who dies in the open country, the birds of the heavens shall eat. And do you know, friends, again, the Lord will be faithful to these promises.

And God willing, we shall see that when we get to 2 Kings. All the things the Lord promises here, they come to pass. And again, just in case, just in case, you might be tempted to have some sort of sympathy for Ahab and Jezebel, the author sticks in this final summary in verse 25 and 26.

He says, verse 25, up to that point in history, there was no one more evil than Ahab and Jezebel. Verse 26, don't forget as well, friends, about all the evil idolatry that we read about earlier in this book.

How they filled the land with foul, raw paganism of Baal worship. How they filled the land that was for the Lord with the pagan gods of the pagan nations that the Lord had driven out of the promised land back in history.

[37 : 51] In other words, they filled the land with demonic idol worship. Friends, what does this teach us today as the Lord's people?

Well, yet again, this is a sober and solemn warning about the seriousness of unrepentant sin. It is serious business. Willful rebellion against the Lord and His Word that refuses to turn to Him.

It is serious. But actually, friends, for those who love the Lord, for those who have suffered terribly for His sake, these words are actually a glorious comfort.

For the reminders that the Lord will see to it that those who've been blasted by the world, His faithful people, they will get justice in the end.

Those who have refused to repent and blasted the church, they will get their comeuppance. The Lord will see that His people get justice. And friends, knowing this should always strengthen and comfort the Naboths of our time.

[39 : 03] Because, as we were praying this morning in church and praying again tonight, there are many like Naboth in the world today, in the persecuted church. Just come along to our prayer meeting, if you've not been before, and you will hear of gospel partners who minister in parts of the world, where great evil has been carried out upon the church, where Christians have suffered terribly at the hands of their oppressors, and it's simply because they love the Lord Jesus, and they refuse to denounce Him as King, as God, and as Savior.

I read of Christians in the past week who at one time watched as members of their family were shot, were put to death right in front of their eyes, and again, it was simply because they refused to renounce Jesus as Lord.

I read reports of church buildings being torched and bulldozed down, homes of Christians being ransacked, robbed and ruined, set alight on fire, they're homeless, they're hungry, there's no aid, and it's all because they bear the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Friends, can you not see how the words of 1 Kings 21 might be a thrill to them, and a help to keep them going, knowing that actually we have a God who cares about justice.

He cares about justice and the good of His people. He will establish justice on the earth, and in the end, His people who have suffered, who have been made to look like idiots for Jesus, they will be vindicated.

[40 : 44] You sitting here tonight, you might feel a bit embarrassed by these words in 1 Kings 21 against Ahab, but the persecuted church is not embarrassed. The persecuted church is delighted, delighted.

well, finally, and very briefly, in verse 27 to 29, the Lord in His wrath remembers mercy.

The Lord in His wrath remembers mercy. In this final section here, these little verses, we are hit by really two things that are surprising, I think.

Firstly, in verse 27, we are told that when Ahab heard the words of judgment, He humbles Himself. He humbles Himself. This man who was the most wicked king of all up to that point in history, He humbles Himself.

For the very first time in His life, He tears His clothing, He dresses up completely in sackcloth, which is what you would do if you were in mourning for someone who was dead.

[41 : 46] And He went about dejectedly. Friends, is this real repentance? Well, the answer is, yes and no. Yes, because twice the Lord says that the king really has humbled himself.

But also tragically, no. Because as we will see in chapter 22, this won't last. This won't last. But for now, here, Ahab really has humbled himself.

And that brings us on to the second thing that is surprising in this section. And it is the way the Lord responds to this man who's just received such message of judgment for all of the evil that he's done.

Please look at verse 28 and 29. And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite saying, Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me?

And here and here we're really supposed to hear the joy and the delight in the Lord's voice. He's delighted to see this changed, thrilled by it.

[42 : 51] Why? Because the Lord our God delights to show mercy to even the vilest offender. That is what the Lord does to Ahab.

In verse 29 he says, In other words, the Lord promises to postpone judgment.

This is not a cancellation of judgment, yes. Judgment will come. The Lord will bring justice. However, the Lord will show mercy in delaying that to come in the future.

I mean, the Lord knows Ahab's humbling won't last because he is the sovereign Lord who knows all things. But in the here and now, Ahab's humbling, it was serious.

It was genuine. And so the Lord says, judgment postponed. And friends, it just makes you wonder, doesn't it, what the Lord would have been prepared to do had Ahab carried on walking humbly before him.

[44 : 02] But that is how it is with our God. He is a God who will judge and punish the unrepentant. He will see that his suffering people get justice for all the wrongs that they've been through at the hands of their enemies.

But friends, don't forget the Lord is also a God who delights to show mercy even to the vilest offender who walks humbly before him, who truly believes.

Now friends, like all Bible passages, that leaves us all with a clear decision here this evening, does it not? Shall we face the Lord as enemy and judge?

Or shall we walk humbly before him all our days, seeking that wonderful mercy? It's the choice we all face. Amen.

Let's bow our heads and we'll pray together. let's pray. Our gracious heavenly Father, our Lord, our God, we pray that you will help us to take your word seriously both this day and every day that we might be a people who walk humbly before you even through days of difficulty, even if the enemy should do his very worst to us.

[45 : 30] May we be a people who always walk humbly, trusting in you, a God of justice. We pray this rebel heart your love subdue and by your spirit make it new.

All this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.