

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dearly Beloved,

When you need a Bible story to demonstrate the sin of coveting, this is it.

What starts off as a simple and logical request from Ahab,

quickly escalated into a host of sad sins, culminating in the death of Naboth and his sons.

It shows us that the sins in the heart are not guiltless thoughts or desires,

but evil that must be cleansed, washed away by the innocent blood of Christ.

*We read as follows in Jesus' name:*

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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 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." But Naboth said to Ahab, "The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers." <sup>(ESV)</sup>

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen.* <sup>(John 17:17)</sup>

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Location. Location. Location.

Those are the first 3 rules of real estate, so I have heard.

And that was what was on the mind of Ahab when he asked Naboth to trade or sell his vineyard.

Ahab was looking for the convenience of a closer vegetable garden to his palace,

and he was willing to give him an even better vineyard for it or its value in money.

He wasn't trying to defraud Naboth; he was looking for a fair exchange.

But Naboth's response seems pretty harsh, doesn't it?

**"The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers."**

Surely the Lord hadn't come down and told Naboth,

"Thou shalt not sell thine vineyard to King Ahab." Right?

So was Naboth being a little over dramatic?

Except, that the Lord HAD forbid it. And while He hadn't come down in a vision

to Naboth specifically about Ahab's proposition, He had revealed His will through Moses in Lev. <sup>25:23</sup>

**"The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is Mine.**

**For you are strangers and sojourners with Me."**

You see, when the Lord gave Israel the Promised Land, it was to serve as a picture of heaven.

He allotted to each tribe, clan, and family its specific inheritance.

They were not to trade, sell, barter or otherwise fritter away their inheritance,

just as they were not to trade, sell, barter or fritter away their eternal inheritance,

leastwise for mere temporal pleasure and comfort in this corrupted world.

The allotment that had fallen to Naboth had been in his family for no less than 5 centuries.

It was his inheritance, not just from his ancestors, but, really, from the Lord Himself,

and he was content with it.

He wasn't looking for a better vineyard.

He wasn't looking for a wad of cash to invest, save, hoard, or prodigal away.

He wasn't even looking to gain favor with the wicked King Ahab by disobeying the Lord.

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But that wasn't the case with Ahab and his wife Jezebel.

Ahab wasn't content with what he already had, he envied Naboth's inheritance.  
He wasn't content to use his royal power as God intended (to serve the people of God),  
Ahab and Jezebel wickedly used it and its influence to serve themselves.

What had started as a reasonable desire of the heart and simple plan of the mind,  
turned very quickly into very wicked acts of the hand.  
Ahab returned to his palace vexed and sullen, that is, having a grownup pity party... pouting.  
Jezebel chided her husband, this selfish child in a man's, nay, a king's body, but she had a plan.  
If Naboth is so pious, she would use God's righteous law against him.  
But, of course, she had to devise a plan using scoundrels and false witnesses.  
And to give it an air of legitimacy, she called upon the leaders of the city to do the deed.

A fast was called, a community-wide observance recognizing that a great sin has taken place.  
Naboth was given a place of prominence, which served to shock the people all the more greatly  
when such an upstanding and righteous citizen was accused of cursing both God and the king,  
both accusations being capital offenses under the Lord's law given through Moses.  
What is more, not only was Naboth wrongfully executed, but so were his sons, <sup>2 Kings 9:26</sup>  
so that no heirs could lay claim to it and thus Ahab could take possession of it.

It is at this point that we see Ahab contented.

Upon hearing that Naboth is dead, he quickly goes down to take possession of the vineyard.  
No indication of remorse is reported at this time; just a cool collected eagerness to capitalize.

This account shows us the danger of the sin of discontentment and covetousness.  
It is a devious sin. It's subtle; festering on and off. Sometimes stronger; sometimes less obvious.  
You don't always know that it is beginning or growing.  
And it manifests itself, not just in the desire for things but also in envy of what others have,  
have in the way of popularity, in skills, in knowledge, in power or influence.

In addition, discontentment/covetousness aren't just a sin of your flesh,  
they're a sin of everyone's flesh,  
and therefore it is always a constant temptation that is fed by the world we live in.  
It's one of the keys to today's marketing strategies, making you think that what you already have  
isn't enough... not good enough, new enough, or prestigious enough... and you need more.  
It's one of the keys to the political shenanigans we see around us,  
instigating discontentment in order to prompt people to action,  
to seize power officially or unofficially.  
Covetousness, fed by discontentment, also feeds into selfish ambition, a desire to get ahead,  
even at the expense of others and to concern yourself principally with your own welfare.  
You can't escape discontentment here. It can come in any form, with anything as its object.

So do not think lightly of the sin of discontentment.

Though the sin is specifically one of the heart, this does not make it less offensive to God  
who sees and knows the workings of the heart.

And don't ignore Discontentment's twin sister, Covetousness.

Because we learn Covetousness' true identity in Colossians 3:5: She is Idolatry.

To harbor covetousness is to idolize not only some person or object or idea in place of God, but also to idolize yourself as you ignore the Lord's command  
*to fear, love and trust in Him above all things.*

Instead, you fear, love, and trust yourself (which is a poor substitute for our gracious God).

And since you have taken to playing god, trusting in your own devices to acquire what you want, making up your own rules makes perfect sense.

And where a sin has been allowed to fester and grow in the heart,

it influences and motivates what you say and do, or what you don't say or do.

At the same time, contentment influences and motivates what you say and do, or don't...

Godliness with contentment can only truly be had when we are at peace with God.

When we are free to ignore the sinful desires of our heart and instead share our blessings with others because these worldly fleeting things are not our gods, our idols, but they are tools by which we are able to serve.

To use the words of the Epistle lesson, to sow, not according to the flesh, but to the Spirit.

We can be content when sin doesn't cause us to fear God's wrath and anger

and instead we see the Father as the gracious and merciful God that He is,

who sent His Son to give us peace with God and make contentment possible here on earth.

Naboth serves as a great picture of Christ, who was content with His allotment from God as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world.

Jesus didn't fear the prince of this world, though he tempted and raged.

Jesus was righteous, yet falsely accused of blaspheme against God and rebellion against the emperor.

He was executed by the authorities, yet innocent of any sin.

He trusted in the Lord, yet His blood was shed on account of the sins of others.

And the reward for His faithfulness was an inheritance in the true Promised Land, not only for Himself, but for all His children.

And this is where we are to find the source for our godliness with contentment.

Not every situation in life will be wonderful. St. Paul attested to that.

He learned **the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.** Philippians4:12

It is found in cherishing the inheritance that has been given to you in your Baptism.

Cherishing your adoption into the Lord's family.

Cherishing your allotted seat at the feet of your Lord, hearing Him say to you,

Your discontentment, your covetousness, your envy is all forgiven you for Christ's sake.

Cherishing your portion at the Lord's table to receive Jesus Himself, crucified and risen for you.

Like Naboth, you can take nothing with you when you die.

Though he refused to disown a piece of land, the land was not his god.

It was a blessing by which God had provided him and his family with daily bread.

A blessing by which the Lord reminded him of His eternal inheritance.

And that blessing had served its purpose, but he needed it no longer; not where he has gone.

This is not a bad frame of reference for us to consider throughout our lives.

Contentment can be had here, in good and difficult times, knowing that you are the Lord's child and that He will provide for you those things He knows to be good for you at the proper time, and that He will take it away from you when He knows that you no longer need. This includes things... and people... and abilities... and power... and prestige... and honor... and health... and even this earthly life.

Recognizing that not only are the things you crave, not yours, but Gods, and that you are not your own, but were bought by Him at a great price, with the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ, so that you may live with Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, with complete contentment, you can confess the words of the hymn, let this *world's pomp be gone. To Heaven I now press on, For all the world I would not stay; My walk is heavenward all the way.* <sup>ELH #252:6</sup>

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost,  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.**

*Soli Deo Gloria*