

What Do We Want?

'A little boy went to see his favorite aunt. When he arrived, his aunt asked him what he wanted to do. He answered, "I love your pancakes, and when we have pancakes at home, I only get to eat three. While I'm here at your house, I want to eat as many pancakes [as] I want". The next morning, the boy's aunt began to pile the pancakes on his plate. The little guy just kept eating and eating the pancakes as fast as he could. By the time he had eaten his tenth pancake, his pace had slowed considerably. In the middle of eating his eleventh pancake, the boy came to an abrupt stop. His aunt asked, "Are you ready for some more pancakes?" With a pained expression on his face, the boy looked up at his aunt and said, "Oh, no, I don't want any more. In fact, I don't even want the pancakes I've already eaten".'

While this boy's predicament was a simple case of one's eyes being bigger than one's stomach, it also illustrates how wrong we can be about what we want. Turns out, his parents' limit of three pancakes for each breakfast was the perfect number. Just enough to be enjoyable, and healthy. Not so many as to make one sick. The boy's parents indeed knew more than he did, and that it would be best for him to follow their lead.

I think we can all agree on this. But, do we ever slip up and

let our wants and desires overrule what we should otherwise know is the prudent, right thing and right course of action? It's far easier said than done to always keep our desires under control. They do have an annoying habit of running roughshod over our better judgement. I'll let each of you fill in the blanks of when this has happened in your own lives. And how often.

In I Kings 21, we read of the most wicked king ever of the northern kingdom of Israel. Its capital city was Samaria, and often it was referred to by that name, Samaria, rather than Israel. At this time, Ahab was the king. His wife, Jezebel, was the queen. Remember truly infamous her? But had Ahab been able to control her, extend his husbandly authority over her, and more importantly, exercise self control over his own wants and desires, history would have ended up judging them far more favorably. Here in chapter 21, King Ahab, in the midst of all the numerous affairs of state he needed to devote his attention, he becomes obsessed with a field. Actually, it was a vineyard, and not a huge one at that. It happened to abut the lands surrounding Ahab's palace. In Ahab's mind, thanks to its perfect location, it would make an outstanding field of fresh produce. He decided he wanted it. Needed it. Badly. So he approached its owner, Naboth, about acquiring it. In exchange for it, he would offer Naboth another property, or if he wanted, just pay cash for it. Naboth, however, was uncooperative. It was his field, handed down to him over many generations. It was part of his family's homestead. No, he would not

part with it. It was not for sale, and could not be sold.

King Ahab, upon hearing this response, turned away down-trodden. Sullen, angry, despondent, he moped around the palace, refusing even to eat, and unable to sleep. Queen Jezebel noticed her husband's anguish and asked him about it. When she heard the particulars of the situation, she reprimanded Ahab, as she often did, of how he was not properly exercising his kingly authority. Worse, he wasn't even behaving as a king should! Leave things to her. She would get that blasted field! And for free!!

We read of her plot. Wielding the king's authority, namely using Ahab's name and signet ring to seal all the fraudulent documents she composed, she launched a conspiracy to assassinate Naboth. Under Ahab's name, the documents ordered Naboth's town elders and leaders to host an event to honor Naboth. But during the ceremonies, two paid-off lowlifes were to show up and accuse Naboth of blaspheming God and cursing the king himself, the penalty for which was death by stoning. Not a particularly pleasant way of departing this life! I wonder how much money changed hands, how much blackmail was involved in getting all the town elders and leaders to go along with what was obviously a wicked scheme to get rid of Naboth. I think we can all see how this was an ancient example of "lawfare", not unlike what we've been experiencing here in America for the last three interminable years! While death by stoning is not among our modern ways of execution and assassination, gunfire is today's preferred method

of choice. As the court cases fail one by one, and the actual attempt by gunfire also failed, that God is miraculously intervening is becoming undeniable to all but the most closed-minded, brain-washed people afflicted with what's been aptly called "Trump derangement syndrome".

In Naboth's case, however, the gears of "justice" turned far swifter. After hearing the unsubstantiated accusations presented during the ceremony supposedly to honor him, he was summarily drug out of the hall to the outskirts of town to be stoned until dead. Problem solved! When the official word reached Jezebel that the ruse had succeeded, she happily announced to the king that the field was now his! Oh, joy! With no hesitation, he went right down to his new field and ordered groundskeepers to start clearing it. Murder over a field!

For entertainment at home, we like murder mysteries. They're a nice diversion because the guilty party is always found out, and justice is always rightly served. At least in the ones we watch. And there's always a compelling motive. Once that is uncovered, the identity of the culprit is soon discovered. But here with Ahab, the motive is exceedingly weak!! Commit murder for a nondescript vineyard? How callous can one get? But, apparently, when one wields tyrannical power, nothing should stand between one's desires and the object of those desires. And thus, the ends justify the means. Whatever it takes, for, to tyrants and terrorists, like Hamas, Hezbollah, the Iranian ayatollahs, what's a

few dozen, a few thousand killed? All martyrs for the cause.

Ahab did many worse things during his tragic 22-year reign. I Kings 21:26 states that his “worst outrage was worshiping idols just as the Amorites had done—the people whom the Lord had driven out from the land ahead of the Israelites” centuries earlier. This statement is truly enlightening. We often think murder is the worst offense humans can commit. But here we clearly see that worshipping anything other than God Himself is the worst possible sin. And here it is so bad because the whole purpose of God was to cleanse the Holy Land of the idol-worshipping Amorites. After all that, here God’s Own Chosen People, the Israelites, were doing exactly the same thing!! So what was the point? The northern kingdom was utterly worthless. Less than worthless. For they had known God, His goodness, mercy, greatness, majesty. His innumerable miraculous signs and wonders. All done on their behalf. And here Ahab, the queen, the town elders and leaders, all participated in a subterfuge that killed a man and robbed a family of its legacy. But it was not without consequence.

Just as Ahab is relishing his new property, the prophet Elijah appears and rains on his parade!! God’s judgement against this travesty, this crime of highest order, is pronounced. Weak-willed Ahab crumbles. Which, in this case, is to his credit. He humbles himself before the Lord. In almost flamboyant fashion, so sincerely he humbles himself. God noticed, and postponed the judgement on Ahab’s dynasty until his sons took the throne. Neverthe-

less, Ahab perished in the very way God pronounced. At the very place where Naboth's life was taken, so would Ahab lose his life in the very same spot. Righteous justice served.

Ahab's sin was not just this murder. Not just this theft. Not just his elevation of Jezebel's agenda over God's. Not just his own idolatry. For in so doing, he led the whole people of Israel into sin. Save for the 7,000 God had told Elijah that had not bowed the knee to baal. Leading others into sin is worse than just sinning one's self. What did Lord Jesus pronounce in Matthew 18:6? "But if anyone abuses, causes to sin, one of these little ones who believes in Me, it would be better for him to have a heavy boulder tied around his neck and be hurled into the deepest sea than to face the punishment he deserves!"

Because we live in Christ's age of grace and forgiveness, we too often forget the horror of our every little sin. We excuse ourselves, and think "little" sins are no big deal. But every single sin against God requires the death penalty. A misspoke word. A hateful look. Every last one of these needs to be repented of. And God is faithful to forgive us because Lord Jesus took the death penalty on our behalf. Ahab sinned by wanting something so trivial, so earthly, so worthless! As Ephesians 4:22 and 24 says, Ahab was "corrupted by sinful and deceitful desires that spring from delusions". But we are "to be transformed as you embrace the glorious Christ-within as your new life and live in union with Him!" *That* is what we should truly *want!*

