

**Warning! Don't Covet! Repent and believe the Good News!**  
1 Kings 21 July 8, 2018 Pastor Robert Hein

Dear Fellow Children of God,

Have you ever seen a warning sign like the one on the screen? **“Warning! Road ahead is flooded! Do not enter! Turn around!”**

When you see a warning sign like that, what do you do? Do you ignore the warning? Do you just keep heading down that road anyway? Do you continue on full speed ahead? Or do you take that warning to heart, immediately stop your car, turn around, and head back to safety? Lots of stranded drivers will tell you how much they regret ignoring the warning sign and plunging headlong into a flooded roadway. You see, they got stuck in that water, and their car became flooded. They learned the hard way the consequences of plowing ahead rather heeding the warning, and turning around.

In our Old Testament lesson today from 1 Kings 21 we hear of a foolish man who also refused to listen to the warning signs, but plunged ahead with his evil plan. That man was wicked King Ahab. We learned about him a few weeks ago when he and his 450 prophets of Baal were challenged by the prophet Elijah on Mt. Carmel. Now Ahab was guilty of many grievous sins, but the one we want to focus on today especially was his sin of **coveting**. He was guilty of coveting Naboth's vineyard.

First of all, let me define coveting for you. It does not simply mean to “want” something. It's okay to want to make the volleyball team and work hard at it, or to buy a smartphone and save up the money to get it. It's not wrong to want things. Coveting however, means to want something that isn't yours to have, to have a sinful desire for something that is off limits to you.

Do you want some examples of coveting? Before Eve took a bite of that forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, she coveted it in her heart. She had a sinful desire for something that was declared “off limits” to her. We read in Genesis 3:6, **“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.”** Before King David had an affair with

Bathsheba, he coveted her. He lusted after her. He, a married man, had a sinful desire for a married woman. Bathsheba was off limits to him. But he wanted her anyway. That's what it means to covet.

Coveting is a sin of the heart. You could argue than anytime you break any of the commandments, you always begin by coveting something in your heart. Before you have an affair, you lust. Before you shoplift, you are greedy. Before you gossip about people and say mean things about them, you hold ill will in your heart. Before you punch someone in the nose, you harbor bitterness and anger toward them. The Apostle James describes the sin of coveting this way, **“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire, but do not have, so you kill. You covet, but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight.”** James 4:1-2

King Ahab coveted Naboth's vineyard. He could see it outside his palace window and he wanted to buy it. Ahab said to Naboth, **“Let me have your vineyard to use for a vegetable garden, since it is close to my palace. In exchange I will give you a better vineyard or, if you prefer, I will pay you whatever it is worth.”** So far, there was nothing wrong with what Ahab did. He asked to buy a piece of property and was willing to pay a fair price for it. But now listen to Naboth's answer, **“The LORD forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my ancestors.”** Naboth made it clear that his property was not for sale for any price. It was his family's inheritance in the promised land.

So now, this property became off limits to Ahab. He should have recognized this, respected Naboth's answer, and learned to be content with all that God had already given him. But Ahab couldn't do that. He coveted Naboth's vineyard. He was consumed with a sinful desire for something that was off limits to him. He had to have it! We read in 1 Kings 21:4, **“So Ahab went home, sullen and angry because Naboth had said, ‘I will not give you the inheritance of my ancestors.’ He lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat.”**

Remember when Cain was angry with his brother Abel. He was consumed with sinful desire; with bitterness, rage and anger. God tried to warn him about this, didn't he? God said, **“Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.”** Genesis 4:6-7

Tragically, Cain did not heed God's warning. He did not master his sinful desires. He did not repent of his bitterness, rage, and anger. Instead that sinful desire in his heart poured out into this life and he went out and killed his own brother.

King Ahab refused to repent of his covetous desires as well. Rather than recognizing that his sinful desire was taking control of him, and repenting of his sinful ways, he allowed those sinful desires to control his behavior. And he was egged on by his evil wife Jezebel. She told Ahab, “When you want something, you deserve to have it. Don't worry about what you have to do, or who you have to trample on to get your way. You are the king, just go for it. Indulge yourself! Remember, you always have to put yourself first!”

And so Ahab gave into his covetous desires and went along with Jezebel's evil plan to have Naboth murdered. They set him up, hiring some scoundrels to tell lies about Naboth in court, so that he was stoned to death. Now Ahab didn't actually throw the stones, but he was still directly responsible for murdering Naboth. And where did the lying and the corruption and the murder all start? With covetous desires in Ahab's heart.

Someone once said, “Coveting is a sin which starts in the heart, flows to the hands, and leads you to hell.” Tragically that is the path which Ahab followed. He thought he got away with murder. He thought pursuing his covetous desires would be good and beneficial for him. But he was wrong, dead wrong. God, the righteous judge, knew the evil which lurked in Ahab's heart and the sin which flowed into his life, and he condemned him for it.

The Lord sent the prophet Elijah to Ahab with this dire message, **“Have you not murdered a man and seized his property? This is what the LORD says: In the place where dogs licked up Naboth's blood, dogs will lick up your blood—yes, yours!”** ”

**Because you have sold yourself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, 'I am going to bring disaster on you. I will wipe out your descendants and cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel.'**

Elijah's warning led Ahab to show a little remorse for a little while, but it didn't last. Sadly King Ahab died in impenitence and unbelief. He is suffering in hell right now. He reaped what he sowed. I hope you and I can learn from his tragic fate so we don't follow in his foolish footsteps.

Now wicked Queen Jezebel has been dead and gone for several 1000 years already. But I have to tell you that her sinful suggestions are still alive and well today, urging you and me to indulge our own covetous desires, just like Ahab did.

Therefore, you and I need to be alert and on our guard so that we don't fall for the same lies that led to Ahab's downfall. Remember, each of us has a selfish sinful nature which prides itself above everyone else, including God and his Word. This sinful world in which we live is also constantly urging us to do our own thing, regardless of what God says, or the cost and consequence to others. Denial of self, shunning sinful pleasure and practicing self-control are all becoming foreign concepts these days. All day long we are told, "Do what feels good, whatever works for you. If you have a desire for something, go for it. It's your body, do with it what you think is best. It's your life, live it as you please."

So we have two different voices urging us in two different directions. Let's say you are surfing the internet or watching TV, and some inappropriate images are displayed on the screen, including pornography or vulgarity or graphic violence. At that moment, God issues you a warning, "Don't go that way! Sin desires to master you, but you must not give in to it. Don't indulge your sinful desires. Don't allow impure thoughts to linger in your mind. Don't covet! Fight those sinful desires and practice self-control." But the devil and your sinful nature are urging you in a different direction. They say, "Go for it! Indulge yourself! Forget about what the Bible says. Ignore the warnings! Don't consider the consequences. Just give in to your passions and satisfy your desires and that will make you feel happy and fulfilled."

Do you feel that tug of war raging within you? This is the spiritual battle you and I are called to fight every day. The Apostle Paul urges us to fight this good fight in his letter to the Ephesians chapter 4:17-24, **“You must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. 18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. 19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed. 20 That, however, is not the way of life you learned 21 when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”**

King Ahab failed to heed the warning. He gave into his covetous desires. He handed over control of his life to his sinful nature, and it led to his eternal destruction. But things don't have to end that way for you and me. Yes, it's true that our sinful nature is just as vile as his. Our covetous desires are just as powerful and the devil is working just as hard to lead us astray.

But you and I can avoid the tragic fate of Ahab and Jezebel if we heed God's warning, take the threats of his law seriously, repent, and believe the good news! Yes, let's learn to deal with sin at its source, the sinful desire of our hearts. Remember, coveting is real sin, it's offensive to God and destructive to us. Lust and greed and pride and anger and bitterness are all serious sins, even while they are still lurking in our hearts. When sinful desires try to control your thoughts and influence your behavior, put a stop to it right then and there! Heed God's warning, turn away from that sin, and ask God for strength to overcome it. Yes, watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation!

When we do fall, don't give up and don't despair. Ask Jesus for forgiveness. Tell him you are sorry for the evil you have thought, spoken and done. Seek his mercy and cling to him for forgiveness. And then ask Jesus to empower you to live a new and holy life to

his glory in the future. That's exactly what King David taught us to pray in Psalm 51, didn't he? "Create in me a clean heart, O God and renew a steadfast spirit within me."

Through the power of the Gospel in the Word, in your baptism and in the Lord's Supper, God will give you the strength you need to fight your covetous desires, to resist temptation and to do what is good and pleasing in God's sight instead.

That's why regular worship and Bible study and prayer are so crucial for us Christians. You see, Jesus doesn't just get us to heaven someday. He also helps us make it through the week. He empowers us to say "no" to sin and temptation and to say "yes" to God's good will for our lives instead. He lifts us up when we fall. He sets us free to serve him in love.

As long as we live in this sinful world, we will have to battle our sinful desires; lust, greed, selfishness, sinful pride and coveting. As long as we live in this corrupt world, the devil will tempt us, and this sinful world will pull us in the wrong direction. But there is help available. There is power for Christian living at your disposal. Remember Jesus is on your side, and he will give you his own strength to overcome and win your daily battle against sin and Satan. Yes, put your trust in Christ for freedom and forgiveness and new life, and he will lead you to victory! Amen.