

“Riches in Christ”

Some stories in the Bible seem to be written for modern day soap operas. They contain deceit, theft, and manipulation that might surprise many readers. For example, the story of Naboth’s vineyard is a warning against theft. In 1 Kings 21, King Ahab resented Naboth because of his beautiful vineyard and Naboth was unwilling to sell his land. Ahab’s wife, Jezebel, told her husband that a king was a law unto himself. She vowed to get the land for her husband. So, she concocted a devious plan to falsely accuse Naboth of blasphemy and treason. The plan works and Naboth is stoned to death. Ahab then takes possession of the land.

How many commandments did they break? They murdered, stole, coveted, and slandered. But their sins do not go unnoticed. The Lord knows everything. He instructs Elijah the prophet to expose the sins of the royal couple. Unexpectedly, the king admits his failure and the Lord postpones punishment upon Ahab. However, there is tension at the end of the chapter. Did Ahab admit his failure because he was caught or because he was remorseful?

Anyway, one of the assumptions behind Elijah’s prosecution of Ahab is the significance of private property. The 8th commandment clearly states that you should not steal. The Lord forbids taking something that does not belong to you without permission. Furthermore, the 10th commandment forbids coveting. Coveting and stealing go hand in hand. Ahab acted upon his covetousness by taking possession of Naboth’s vineyard. Elijah rebuked Ahab according to the law of God, demonstrating that moral law applies universally. In a way, private property is a check on the deconsolidation of political power. When citizens are free to acquire property, it can serve as a check against the monopolization of property by a ruling class, as evidenced by the story of Ahab and Naboth.

Scripture reveals three other truths about private property. First, Scripture reveals that the Lord is the maker of them all (Prov. 22:2). He is the Creator and has given created things as good gifts. We are merely stewards. As much as we are to enjoy the good gifts of creation, they should direct us to turn from love for them to their Creator. Second, the gifts we receive are gifts to be shared for the benefit of others. Instead of stealing, the thief is to do honest work to share with anyone in need (Eph. 4:29).

Third, Jesus is the everlasting source of our true riches. Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). He is sufficient for our needs. Because he is everlasting, we have an eternal security in Him, whether we are rich or poor in earthly gifts.

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