

AUG 11, 2024

Marion weekly update

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Aug 4 sermon— ‘Heroes and Villains : Jezebel’ 1 Kings 16:31-33, 2 Kings 9:22-26

Last week we found our hero or villain convincingly heroic. This week I think we find a villain convincingly villainous. Our figure this week to consider is Jezebel.

Jezebel is very misunderstood if we go along with how her name is used popularly. “You shameless Jezebel!” She seems to have been connected to women of loose moral character shall we say. Yet she wasn’t that kind of a seductress. At least not in a physically intimate way that we know of. Though she did seduce a king and a nation away from God, which is arguably far more nefarious.

There isn’t a decent word written about this woman, which is sad. Everything is wrapped up in idolatry, manipulation, malice, and plotting.

When she marries King Ahab, we see Ahab not heeding the examples that came before. One of the great reasons for prohibiting various marriages was to prevent leading faithful Israelites into idolatry. Ahab didn’t pay attention. He marries Jezebel who promptly leads him into idolatry, specifically the worship of Baal.

As goes the king goes the nation and Ahab leads the nation to Baal worship. This comes to an ugly head as the prophet Elijah believes he is the only one to not give in to idolatry. God reassures him this isn’t the case, but Elijah’s misery is a strong indication of how far Israel had fallen, keeping in mind the origin of it was Jezebel’s leading Ahab.

Elijah has the famous competition on Mount Carmel with many prophets of Baal. Baal is unresponsive to the long, complicated, even gruesome requests of his believers. The God of Elijah responds quickly and decisively. The prophets of Baal run in their defeat but are pursued, overtaken, and ultimately killed by Elijah. The response of Jezebel has Elijah shaking in his shoes. She declares that just as Elijah has killed her prophets so she will kill Elijah.

Then there is the story of Naboth’s vineyard. Ahab desires a piece of land owned by a guy named Naboth who will not give it to him even for a price. As Ahab sulks Jezebel concocts a plot to have Naboth wrongly executed so Ahab can take the land. She succeeds and Ahab gets his little plot of ground.

Notice here something through all of it. Ahab may be king but Jezebel is calling the shots. She is orchestrating much of the problem in the nation and Ahab’s court. Ahab seems to be somewhat spineless letting himself be led about by the nose so long as he gets his way.

This is a first place to take a lesson from this story. We often hear satan get blamed for temptation and leading astray. Temptation does come, and the temptation for us to tempt another also comes from somewhere. The problem is continually placing it on some faceless boogeyman rather than the one or ones that are listening to their or our own temptations and imparting them to others.

If Ahab was looking at Jezebel and imparting her issues to satan he can find himself in a dangerous bind. It’s not Jezebel right? It’s just the devil in her. It wouldn’t be right to get away from her. I just need to see that it’s the devil and not her.

Rarely does this happen that the separation is made. In this situation make no mistake, Jezebel is the voice. Jezebel is the influence. Jezebel is the one Ahab is listening to. Jezebel has become Ahab’s God in reality. Not Yahweh. Not even Baal. He listens to her to his own detriment and the detriment of his nation.

Ungodly council is everywhere. Sometimes, as in Jezebel it doesn’t even try to hide itself as ungodly. It just appeals to our self-interest, separates us from what is truly Christlike and genuinely Godly, and the next thing a life has been reframed and readjusted to think it is living in the light of Christ but is truly living in the darkness of a lie.

Prophecies are pronounced against Ahab and Jezebel. Ahab’s demise comes first. Later we see as King Jehu of Judah is addressing the problems in the kingdom of Israel under Joram that Jezebel’s ways have persisted even in Ahab’s absence. She infected a nation with ungodliness and idolatry. While Jehu wasn’t the greatest king in Judah, here he does pull them back from idolatry and in the doing sees

to it that the prophecy against Jezebel is fulfilled and her end under his hand is swift.

The first lesson we've already considered from Jezebel is to be careful who we listen to. What is the other's agenda? Is the council Godly and wise? Fortunately we have the ability to regulate what we entertain fairly well. We can choose with whom we discuss and share significant details about life and living. In terms of talking heads in the media we can switch a station or turn off the tv, computer, phone, etc. altogether.

The amount of angst and confusion that we endure internally is frequently tied to the voices we allow in our heads. Jesus cautions us to be wary of what we allow into ourselves as it will affect what we produce. While what we consume may not necessarily be sinful, what we consume shapes our attitudes in ways that can lead us to sin.

Hand in glove with being mindful of what voices we allow to hold sway over us is the steadfastness of our faith. Have we allowed the Holy Spirit to form in us a compass that points reliable Godward?

Ahab had not. Wherever it pointed, God wasn't the truest destination. This is evident by how he allowed an idolatrous wife to lead him into sin. His lack of spiritual backbone made him vulnerable to her leading, and that led to his own end. Even trying to allow her to handle Naboth's situation, perhaps thinking that if she was the bad actor he himself would be off the hook, he learned that commissioning bad acting is no different than doing the acting himself.

The beauty of having a strong faith compass is that it does more than shield us from ungodly guidance. It also allows us to share space and company with people with whom we disagree. We are able to impact the world by affecting the ungodly for Christ rather than being persuaded away from Christ ourselves.

This fear that we'll be "led away" hampers too much necessary witness and short circuits relationships that are vital to help others find a path to relationship with Jesus. Christians avoid people that don't hold the same values and belief out of fear of being influenced themselves. While those same people sometimes tout this as their strength of faith and unwillingness to compromise in reality it's the opposite.

If my faith is strong and my compass points true to God, I can enter the mission field with confidence that I won't be led astray because my heart is fortified. The Jezebel holds no threat because decisions about who and what I will do and be have already been made in light of a solid faith.

There will always be those voices in our ears trying to distract us and direct us away from God. As Peter tells us about the devil, the solution is incredibly simple. "Resist the devil and he will flee." "Resist the Jezebel and her words have no power."

Each of us is more powerful than we realize. That power lies in the Holy Spirit that is continually guiding and empowering us. It is the power to step outside of the echo chambers that are everywhere to engage with the different and with the other. In that engagement is the power to transform our hearts and to change the world by influencing another to consider a world that is centered on the two commands that sum up every other. Love God and love one another.