

Lesson 9: Enough

Introduction

This week we're talking about the ninth and tenth commandments: "You shall not covet." These commandments are about being content with what you have, and making sure your neighbor keep what is theirs, too. We're going to learn about these commandments in three ways.

1. We'll hear the story of Naboth's vineyard, and how King Ahab and Queen Jezebel showed just how destructive it can be to break this commandment.
2. We'll learn about what it means to be content with what we have, and how to make sure our neighbor keeps what is theirs.
3. We'll learn that the commandment not to covet means we change the world by recognizing what is enough, and how to encourage others to be content too.

The Story of Naboth's Vineyard (1 Kings 21)

There was once a king of Israel, named Ahab. Ahab was, by the standards of his day, a pretty successful king. He won a lot of battles, he had plenty of chariots and horses, he had a wife who got him an alliance with a neighboring kingdom, and things were going pretty well for him. However, Ahab could be a bit moody when things didn't go his way. He had to deal with this thorn in his side prophet named Elijah—y'all have heard of Elijah I hope—and despite being king, he couldn't do just whatever he wanted.

So it was that one day, Ahab was touring his property when he saw this really wonderful vineyard just across the property line. It was beautiful—full grape vines, lovely sun falling on every row, and easy access from his own land. He decided he wanted that vineyard, so he went to the owner's house, a guy named Naboth.

Now, Naboth was a no-nonsense kind of guy. He was stout and hard-working, and he had built his vineyard up from what his father had given him, and what his grandfather had given his father. It was the family farm, and he was very proud of how well it had turned out. The king had just recently bought a plot of land next to his, which seemed nice enough. Perhaps the king would make a good neighbor? He was about to find out when the king came to his door.

After the usual pleasantries and "how's the family" kind of conversation, the king cut to the chase. "I like your vineyard, and I am willing to trade you another piece of my property in exchange for this vineyard," he said. "And if you don't want land, then I will pay you cash."

Naboth was surprised, offended even. See, in ancient Israel, land you got from your parents wasn't just property that could be bought and sold. Land was a sacred responsibility. It

was where your parents had put in labor to make a life. It was where your grandparents were buried. Only desperate people, who had literally no other options left, would even contemplate selling off their land! So Naboth got angry that the king would even make such a suggestion. He flat-out refused the king's offer and swore that God would strike him down if he ever sold his family land.

King Ahab got the message, and left. But he wasn't happy about it. In fact, he started thinking about how other kings seemed to be able to do whatever they wanted. In Syria and Egypt, kings didn't even have to pay for their subjects' land; they could just take it with a decree. But here Ahab was, totally unable to even buy a single vineyard. He wanted that vineyard so bad because he knew it would make excellent grapes for excellent wine. He would grow richer if he just had it, if Naboth had just accepted his very generous offer. It upset him so much that he laid down and stared at the wall, not even responding to his servants when they checked on him. He didn't say a word until his wife, Jezebel, came home.

Jezebel was a lot of things to the writers of the Bible—a seductress, a witch, a pagan, an evil woman bent on turning people from worshipping God—but one thing she definitely was, was in love with her husband. Jezebel was there for Ahab 110%. So when she came into his room and found him pouting on his bed, she asked what the problem was. Ahab explained how Naboth flat-out refused to sell him the vineyard, even though Ahab was being completely fair—far fairer than any king in the surrounding countries would be. He should be thankful the king was even willing to do that much.

Jezebel then did what she always did. She fixed the problem. She put a plan in motion to make sure her husband, her king, would be happy. She wrote a letter using the king's seal and sent it to the village elders instructing them to find two men who would be willing to accuse Naboth of blasphemy, which was a crime punishable by death. She needed two men, because a crime like that needed two witnesses. The elders followed what they thought were the king's instructions, got a couple ne'er-do-wells to accuse Naboth of blasphemy, and after a quick trial, had him taken out and stoned to death. Then they sent word back to the palace.

Jezebel came back to find Ahab still pouting, and told him to sit up straight, be happy, and go claim the now *former* Naboth's vineyard for himself. He was so happy that he got up, washed his face, and immediately ran down to Naboth's vineyard and declared it his—he was the king, after all, and the former owner was a blasphemer, a criminal. Ahab got what he wanted, even if it cost Naboth his reputation and his life.

What it means to be content

We're looking at the ninth and tenth commandments. They have some small differences, but it's mostly on the emphasis. The lesson is the same: don't covet what isn't yours. To covet means to want something badly enough that it causes problems—problems for

you, problems for other people, or especially problems for your interactions with others. Coveting something is more than just wanting it; it's wanting something so much that you'll break rules or hurt other people to get it. It's like a dangerous level of wanting. It's the obsessive end of wanting.

These commandments tell us that coveting is dangerous, and God wants us to train ourselves not to covet. The best place to start in order to follow this commandment is to be able to recognize the difference between a want and a need. Needs are things that everyone should have, the kind of stuff that keeps us alive and sane. These are all things that, if we didn't have them, it would be more than annoying that we don't have access to them. Wants, on the other hand, are just things that we desire because we think they will make us happier. You need food, but you don't need dessert. You need shelter, but you don't need a marble mansion with an indoor pool. You need connection with people, but you don't need 24-hour access to your social media account.

When we blur the lines between wants and needs, it becomes really hard to follow this commandment, because coveting always involves things that we want, not things that we need. Ahab did not need that vineyard he took from Naboth; he just wanted it. And when we think the things that we want are actually things we need, we're much more willing to hurt other people in order to get those things. But of course, this commandment isn't just about being content with what we have and not coveting others' stuff. It's also about helping our neighbors be content with what they have.

Martin Luther was a bit too specific to his sixteenth century context, so I'm going to paraphrase him here. Essentially, he described the ninth and tenth commandments as saying that we are to fear and love God, so that we will be content with what we have, and will help our neighbor keep what they have and be content with it. We're called to train ourselves and our neighbors to be content with what we have, to recognize the difference between a want and a need, and in the process, make sure that each person is able to keep the things that are theirs.

Being content is the opposite of coveting. When you are content, it means you recognize that you have what you need, and while you might want things, you're not going to prioritize what you want over what your neighbor needs. The thing is, God does give enough for everyone to have enough, as long as we make sure everyone gets what they need. When we covet, we end up taking what someone else needs. But if we are content, we will be able to share because we'll know we have more than enough already.

How does it affect the real world?

Commercials are a multi-billion-dollar industry. There are people whose entire jobs are to figure out ways to make people want a thing that their company is selling. And companies

will pay big bucks to advertise in places and ways that will get more people to want their product—just look at the Superbowl. But the bedrock of advertising is to convince you that you need this thing they're selling, when almost every time, it's just something you might want. Commercials are temptations to break the ninth or tenth commandments.

But it's not just that. When we get bombarded by commercials showing us happy, beautiful people who are only happy and beautiful because they bought this product, it makes us start to believe we need that product too. A lot of things in the world try to make us believe that if we just had the right thing, we'd be happy. And the big problem with that is that no one thing will ever make us happy. The things that you want—any of the things that you want—might make you a little happier for a little while, but they won't make you happy. It's because the world is working to confuse wants and needs.

So our calling, in following the ninth and tenth commandments, is to train ourselves to be content, and help others learn to be content too. Being content with what you have, and leading others to do the same, will change the world. If we all realized that we only need what we actually *need*, and not everything we *want*, we'd realize just how abundantly God has provided for everyone. And if we learn to be content with what we have, we'll also find that we're much more capable of being generous with our neighbors, because we know we have more than we need.

Imagine if the world realized that. Imagine if everyone who had more than they needed realized they could be content, and shared their excess with those with less. Everyone would have enough. And if people learned to be content with what they had, when they had enough, then no one would feel the need to take from anyone else. We wouldn't be jealous of what our neighbor had because we'd know that if we have what we need, we're good. Being content with what we have frees us to do what God calls us to do, and be generous with our neighbors.

To review:

1. We heard the story of Naboth's vineyard, and how King Ahab and Queen Jezebel showed just how destructive it can be to break this commandment.
2. We learned about what it means to be content with what we have, and how to make sure our neighbor keeps what is theirs.
3. We learned that the commandment not to covet means we change the world by recognizing what is enough, and how to encourage others to be content too.