

The Challenge of Injustice

Rich Nathan

August 18-19, 2007

1 and 2 Kings: Facing Life's Challenges

1 Kings 21

I want to begin today by sharing with you the story of a dictator whose name many of you are familiar with. He is Robert Mugabe from the Southern African country of Zimbabwe, the country that used to be known as Rhodesia.

SLIDE – Robert and Grace Mugabe

Robert Mugabe took over Zimbabwe following the collapse of the white-ruled government in 1980 and he has held onto power for the last 27 years. Initially, he was hailed by his own people and other African leaders as one of the great advocates for social justice and peaceful transition to black rule. In fact, initially, Robert Mugabe was thought of as being similar to Nelson Mandela – not only a governmental leader, but a moral leader, almost a spiritual leader.

But Mugabe has turned into the opposite of Nelson Mandela. In recent years he has drained the Zimbabwean treasury to purchase more and more luxury items for himself and his much-younger wife, Grace. There is a 41 year age gap between Robert Mugabe and his former secretary, who is now his wife.

Grace Mugabe is infamous for her wildly extravagant shopping sprees in Paris. Her husband, Robert, keeps purchasing new limousines all the while that his countrymen are literally starving to death. This dictator has so-wrecked the country's economy that the inflation rate in Zimbabwe this year is predicted to exceed 11,000%. Here in the U.S. we get upset if the inflation rate goes above 4%. In Zimbabwe they changed the prices on goods twice daily. When the few wealthy men in the country go to play golf, they purchase their drinks at the beginning of the golf outing, because by the time they get through playing 18 holes, the price of the drinks will have doubled.

Mugabe has surrounded himself with thousands of secret police, who are feared throughout the country because of their brutal methods of torture and murder of political opponents and their families. And in one particularly cold-hearted act, Mugabe sent his men out to bulldoze the shacks of 700,000 squatters scattered throughout the country. The campaign to knock down the squatter shacks was cruelly called "Take Out the Trash." Several hundred thousand people were rendered entirely homeless by a man who calls them "Trash" and who serves imported French truffles to his dinner guests at the cost of \$400 a head.

One of the things that Robert Mugabe has done is amassed more and more land for himself.

SLIDE

Stories of unjust takings

Using his secret police, he went to the farms of white landowners and seized the farms for his own private possession. Then out of the State treasury he hired government workers to build roads to his newly seized farms and to work the farms all for his own personal enrichment. Along with Mugabe's violence and suppression of all political and religious opposition, there is this abuse of power through unjust taking for himself of property that belongs to another.

I want to begin by sharing the story of Carlos Barragan and his son, Carlos, Jr.

SLIDE – Carlos Barragan

These are two former boxers whose names have been in the news recently not for taking steroids or for torturing dogs, or betting on sporting events. Carlos Barragan and his son have been in the news not for abusing their girlfriends, or for demanding the restructuring of their contracts before they play. These are two guys who run a little boxing gym between the Mexican border and the San Diego barrios called The Community Youth Athletic Center.

What these two men have done for the last 16 years is take poor kids off the street, and train them in the discipline of boxing. Now in addition to teaching the kids boxing, they require them to get academic tutoring. There is a ring of computers in this community center. All of the services of the community center are free. It is all run by volunteers.

So why have the Barragan's and their community center hit the news all over America? It is because the street that this center is located on has been declared a "blighted area." The center, by the way, is actually a very clean, well-cared for community center. But the city designated it as a blighted area and they are planning to tear down this center so that a wealthy developer can construct a 24-story building housing luxury condos and upscale shopping.

The government's power to take private property in this country used to be restricted to taking for a public purpose like road, or school. But more and more communities are using the government's power to take private property in order to give it to wealthy developers so that they can build more shopping centers and McMansions for the well-heeled. And the kids in the neighborhood who have been served for 16 years by the Barragans? I guess the feeling is that there are other places for those kids than getting loving coaching in boxing, school, and life. There is always money for another jail cell.

This morning we are going to read a troubling story in the scriptures about the unjust taking of property. The story is closer to Robert Mugabe and his seizure

of property in Zimbabwe than this more finessed and less violent seizure in California. I've been doing a series that I've titled "Facing Life's Challenges" from the book of 1 Kings. I've titled today's talk, The Challenge of Injustice.

SLIDE – 1 Kings 21

1 Some time later there was an incident involving a vineyard belonging to Naboth the Jezreelite. The vineyard was in Jezreel, close to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. 2 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." 3 But Naboth replied, "The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my ancestors."

4 So Ahab went home, sullen and angry because Naboth the Jezreelite had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my ancestors." He lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat. 5 His wife Jezebel came in and asked him, "Why are you so sullen? Why won't you eat?" 6 He answered her, "Because I said to Naboth the Jezreelite, 'Sell me your vineyard; or if you prefer, I will give you another vineyard in its place.' But he said, 'I will not give you my vineyard.' "

7 Jezebel his wife said, "Is this how you act as king over Israel? Get up and eat! Cheer up. I'll get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."

8 So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, placed his seal on them, and sent them to the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth's city with him. 9 In those letters she wrote: "Proclaim a day of fasting and seat Naboth in a prominent place among the people. 10 But seat two scoundrels opposite him and have them bring charges that he has cursed both God and the king. Then take him out and stone him to death."

11 So the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth's city did as Jezebel directed in the letters she had written to them. 12 They proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth in a prominent place among the people. 13 Then two scoundrels came and sat opposite him and brought charges against Naboth before the people, saying, "Naboth has cursed both God and the king." So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death. 14 Then they sent word to Jezebel: "Naboth has been stoned to death." 15 As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned to death, she said to Ahab, "Get up and take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite that he refused to sell you. He is no longer alive, but dead." 16 When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, he got up and went down to take possession of Naboth's vineyard.

17 Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite: 18 "Go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who rules in Samaria. He is now in Naboth's vineyard, where he has gone to take possession of it. 19 Say to him, 'This is what the Lord says: Have you not murdered a man and seized his property?' Then say to him, 'This is what the Lord says: In the place where dogs licked up Naboth's blood, dogs will lick up your blood—yes, yours!' "

20 Ahab said to Elijah, "So you have found me, my enemy!" "I have found you," he answered, "because you have sold yourself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord. 21 He says, 'I am going to bring disaster on you. I will wipe out your descendants and cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel—slave or free. 22 I will make your

house like that of Jeroboam son of Nebat and that of Baasha son of Ahijah, because you have aroused my anger and have caused Israel to sin.’ 23 “And also concerning Jezebel the Lord says: ‘Dogs will devour Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.’ 24 “Dogs will eat those belonging to Ahab who die in the city, and the birds will feed on those who die in the country.” 25 (There was never anyone like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife. 26 He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols, like the Amorites the Lord drove out before Israel.)

27 When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted. He lay in sackcloth and went around meekly. 28 Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite: 29 “Have you noticed how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself, I will not bring this disaster in his day, but I will bring it on his house in the days of his son.”

Now we read in 1 Kings 21:1-3 about the king of Israel, King Ahab, who wanted to buy a vineyard from a man named Naboth. King Ahab wanted to turn that vineyard into a vegetable garden.

SLIDE – 1 Kings 21:1-3

1 Some time later there was an incident involving a vineyard belonging to Naboth the Jezreelite. The vineyard was in Jezreel, close to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. 2 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.” 3 But Naboth replied, “The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my ancestors.”

There are a few things going on here. It may be that the author is alluding to a bigger story that is going on in the life of the nation of Israel. Vineyard is a symbol in the Old Testament of God’s people. In fact, the reason we chose the name Vineyard for our church and our association is that in the Old Testament vineyard is often used as a symbol for God’s people Israel. Naboth owns a vineyard. King Ahab, the evil and unjust King, wants to take the vineyard and turn it into a vegetable garden. In the Old Testament, vegetable gardens were often associated with the nation of Egypt, who enslaved Israel, the people of God. So King Ahab may be symbolically taking away the people of God’s inheritance and bringing them back into the land of bondage – Egypt.

Naboth refuses to sell the land. The land according to Jews would have been owned by God and it was to pass from generation to generation as an inheritance for one’s children and grandchildren.

We pick up the story in verses 4-7,

SLIDE – 1 Kings 21:4-7

4 So Ahab went home, sullen and angry because Naboth the Jezreelite had said, “I will not give you the inheritance of my ancestors.” He lay on his bed sulking

and refused to eat. 5 His wife Jezebel came in and asked him, “Why are you so sullen? Why won’t you eat?” 6 He answered her, “Because I said to Naboth the Jezreelite, ‘Sell me your vineyard; or if you prefer, I will give you another vineyard in its place.’ But he said, ‘I will not give you my vineyard.’ ” 7 Jezebel his wife said, “Is this how you act as king over Israel? Get up and eat! Cheer up. I’ll get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.”

In verse 7 I think that we discover the heart of the issue of injustice.

SLIDE

What is injustice?

King Ahab, this weak, vacillating, idolatrous king of Israel is married to a woman named Jezebel. Jezebel is not a Jew. She is not an Israelite. Jezebel was a foreign woman, a Phoenician. And the Phoenicians had a very different understanding of a King’s power than did the Israelites. For the Israelites, God’s law restrained the King’s power. God was the King and God had given the Jews a law that applied to everyone, including the King. God’s law specifically addressed the king and limited the king’s powers so that the king could not abuse people through the misuse of his office.

But the other nations surrounding Israel had a very different understanding of kingship. For the other nations, including Phoenicia, being king meant one thing: unlimited power – power to do whatever you wanted to do; power to serve yourself. And that is what Jezebel is saying to Ahab in verse 7 when she says:

SLIDE – 1 Kings 21:7

7 Jezebel his wife said, “Is this how you act as king over Israel? Get up and eat! Cheer up. I’ll get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.”

“Don’t you understand the meaning of being king? To be king means that you have unrestricted power. To be king means that you can do whatever you want to do.”

And this leads to the definition of injustice. What is injustice? When we say that something is unjust, what are we talking about? Injustice is the abuse of power. Let me give you a definition from one of the most moving books that I’ve read in the last five years. It is called *Good News About Injustice* by Gary Haugen. Gary Haugen heads up a ministry called The International Justice Mission. Gary Haugen’s organization, IJM, hires attorneys and investigators to go into various places around the world where there are particularly egregious incidents of injustice. How does Gary Haugen define injustice? Here is what he says:

SLIDE

Injustice occurs when power is misused to take from others what God has given them, namely their life, dignity, liberty, or the fruits of their love and labor.

In other words, injustice is fundamentally about an abuse of power. Let me share with you an illustration of the abuse of power.

World Vision in India, which is a Christian relief agency, introduced Gary Haugen to a 10-year old girl named Kanmani. From 8 a.m. in the morning until 6 p.m. at night, 6 days a week, this little 10-year old girl sits in the same place on the floor at a factory that manufactures cigarettes. Her job is to close the ends of the cigarettes with a little knife. She is required to complete 2000 cigarettes a day. If she doesn't work fast enough, her overseer hits her over the head with a club. Her 10 hour work day is broken up by a single 30 minute lunch period. At the end of a long work week, she gets her wages. What does this 10-year old girl earn for working 10 hours a day, 6 days a week? She earns \$.75 cents. For this, she's been at this job for 5 years. She's been doing this since she was 5 years old. Some of you have children or grandchildren her age.

Why is Kanmani forced to do this? She is a bonded laborer. That means she has to work like this to pay off a family debt. In a moment of economic crisis, her family borrowed \$50. To secure the loan, Kanmani's parents had to agree to send her to work for the money lender. But by the terms of the agreement, the entire \$50 debt has to be paid off in a lump sum and the family is never able to put \$50 together. They need Kanmani's 75 cents a week to survive. And all the while, the money lender makes thousands of dollars off this little girl.

What is injustice? It is the abuse of power. God gives each of us power. But power is to be exercised in the way that God exercises power. How does God exercise his power? He exercises it on behalf of the weak. God uses power to lift people up. God uses his power to heal people. God uses his power to reconcile marriages. God uses his give and to bless. But the unjust use their power to take from the weak.

Have you ever been the victim of an abuse of power? Someone stronger than you physically hurt you, a trusted friend stole from you? A friend misused their position of trust and betrayed you? An employer wrongfully terminated you? Have you ever been the victim of an abuse of power? Have you every abused your superior power with a child, a spouse, or an employee?

The further we get from God, the more we tend to abuse power and perpetrate injustice. Read with me verses 8-14,

SLIDE – 1 Kings 21:8-14

8 So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, placed his seal on them, and sent them to the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth's city with him. 9 In those letters she wrote: "Proclaim a day of fasting and seat Naboth in a prominent place among the people. 10 But seat two scoundrels opposite him and have them bring charges that he has cursed both God and the king. Then take him out and stone

him to death.” 11 So the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth’s city did as Jezebel directed in the letters she had written to them. 12 They proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth in a prominent place among the people. 13 Then two scoundrels came and sat opposite him and brought charges against Naboth before the people, saying, “Naboth has cursed both God and the king.” So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death. 14 Then they sent word to Jezebel: “Naboth has been stoned to death.”

We see in verses 8-14 the methodology, the techniques for working injustice.

SLIDE

What are the techniques of injustice?

All of Jezebel’s actions are done under the guise of lawfulness. The injustice is worked through the legal system. You can just imagine the documents being signed accused this innocent man, Naboth, of blaspheming God. You can imagine these people swearing under oath that they heard the blasphemy. The elders and judges pretending that they are shocked. They have this show trial with testimony taken and verdicts recorded.

It is very common in situations of grave injustice for the form of the law to be observed. Unless we’re talking about an absolute dictatorship, there is no need in any way to cater to public opinion. Almost always what you see regarding injustice is the form of lawfulness being observed. The Nazis in particular were sticklers for getting the right stamps on the documents that deported Jews to concentration camps, having everything be in triplicate, getting the proper signatures, everything recorded oh-so-neatly. Have you ever been abused by someone who used the legal system to perpetrate an injustice against you?

Underneath the form of law, there are almost always two things at work in every instance of injustice: deception and the threat of violence. Look with me at Psalm 10 for a moment. It is a psalm in which the psalmist cries out to God as he observes the injustice around him.

We find these techniques in verses 2, 7, and 8-10,

SLIDES – Psalm 10:2

In their arrogance the wicked hunt down the weak, catching them in the schemes they devise.

We read about the schemes the wicked devises. There are always deceptive schemes. In verses 8-9, we read about the unjust lying in wait, using the cover of darkness to attack their victim.

SLIDE – Psalm 10:8-9

They lie in wait near the villages; from ambush they murder the innocent. Their eyes watch in secret for their victims; 9 like a lion in cover they lie in wait. They lie in wait to catch the helpless; they catch the helpless and drag them off in their nets.

Deception and violence. Let me ask you a question, have you ever been the victim of injustice through deception? Have you ever been lied to by a boyfriend or a girlfriend, a fiancé, or God forbid, a spouse who was covering up an affair? Or someone manipulating the truth in order to steal from you? Have you ever been the victim on injustice through deception?

SLIDE – Psalm 10:7

7 Their mouths are full of lies and threats; trouble and evil are under their tongues.

SLIDE – Psalm 10:10

The innocent are crushed, they collapse; they fall victim to superior strength.

You know, many people in the world have been victims of injustice through violence and through the threat of violence. I have a good friend who formerly attended this church. I will call him Ali. He is a Muslim-background believer in Jesus from the Sudan in Africa. Ali could have lived comfortably here in the U.S., but as a Christian he has chosen to go back to the Sudan to serve his people and point them to Christ. As part of Ali's work, he goes in and out of the Darfur Region in the Sudan. You are familiar with the Darfur from the news – that region of Western Sudan in which 2 million people have been displaced, tens of thousands killed.

Just this past week Ali was in town and he told me a story of recent injustice in the Darfur Region. Some men from the Darfur were shepherds and they decided to steal some of the cattle belonging to Arab herdsman. These Africans from the Darfur ended up murdering a few of the Sudanese Arab herdsman and stole their cattle. The Arabs decided that they were going to retaliate with machine guns given to them by the government. They planned to raid an entire village where these African thieves were supposed to live, and to murder everyone in the village. The villagers found out about this plan and so they fled the village. Many of the villagers got on a train, others decided to flee on foot.

Well, the Arabs caught up with the train. They unhooked the train's engine so that the train stopped. This was an old wooden train. The Arabs took gasoline, poured it over the train, and then set it on fire burning alive 1000 men, women, and children. It was such an outrageous act of violence that some Muslim Arabs from this area protested. They said that this act of violence was anti-Islam. That only Allah had the power to take someone's life through burning. They demanded a government investigation. The Sudanese government investigated and through the threat of violence, they forced everyone of these protestors to

recant their protest, and to say the incident never happened, or they would be thrown in jail for stirring up ethnic division. Only one man refused to recant. He is now a political refugee here in America and will never see his family again.

Deception, the cloak of legality, violence, and the threat of violence, these are the tools, the techniques of working injustice around the world.

SLIDE

What roles do people play in working injustice?

I think we see three different roles as workers of injustice. We see, first of all, the perpetrator. Here is Jezebel in 1 Kings 21:8-10,

SLIDE – 1 Kings 21:8-10

8 So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, placed his seal on them, and sent them to the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth's city with him. 9 In those letters she wrote: "Proclaim a day of fasting and seat Naboth in a prominent place among the people. 10 But seat two scoundrels opposite him and have them bring charges that he has cursed both God and the king. Then take him out and stone him to death."

Jezebel is the instigator of this injustice, the person who thinks up this crime, orders it and pays for it, and executes it. When I think about perpetrators of injustice, I can't think of a better example than folks who are running the sex/tourist trade around the world. Do you know that there are companies that sell travel tours to American men who wish to travel to another country in order to have sex with a child. These American predators travel to Thailand, Cambodia, Mexico, and Costa Rica. They stay in nice hotels there and for a few dollars they can have anonymous sex with a 12-year old boy or girl, or sometimes with children who are younger. They inflict on these children lifelong emotional wounds and physical wounds and sexually transmitted diseases – all under the cloak of anonymity.

Along with the perpetrators, there are the collaborators, people who cooperate with the perpetrators' plans. We see that in verses 11-14,

SLIDE – 1 Kings 21:11-14

11 So the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth's city did as Jezebel directed in the letters she had written to them. 12 They proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth in a prominent place among the people. 13 Then two scoundrels came and sat opposite him and brought charges against Naboth before the people, saying, "Naboth has cursed both God and the king." So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death. 14 Then they sent word to Jezebel: "Naboth has been stoned to death."

The elders and leaders in the city, the two men who were false witnesses, and the folks who pick up the stones to kill Naboth – they all collaborate in this injustice. I think of homes that have been scarred by sexual abuse. The perpetrator is a step-father, a boyfriend, on occasion, a father. What is mom doing? She is going along with the cover-up out of fear, or perverted loyalty, or because she feels trapped. Mom becomes a collaborator in injustice.

One of my very favorite editorial writers, Nicholas Kristof, who writes for the NY Times, recently did a piece on some safe houses that he visited in Southern China. The safe houses were occupied by North Koreans who had fled to the so-called “free world” of China. Many of these North Koreans were Christians and they were living in these safe houses in China in incredible fear of being discovered by the Chinese government. If the Chinese government found them, they would ship them right back to North Korea where these Christian brothers and sisters of ours would be sentenced for years of hard labor and, if they were repeat offenders, they and their entire family would be sent to a prison camp for life. In the worst cases, if the person who was shipped back to North Korea became an evangelist in China, there is a public trial and the Christian evangelist is executed in front of the crowd by a firing squad.

The Chinese government knows all about this extraordinary oppression of Christians in North Korea and it collaborates, it cooperates, it supports North Korean injustice.

Perpetrators, collaborators, and then there are the passive beneficiaries of injustice. Look at verse 15-16 with me.

SLIDE – 1 Kings 21:15-16

15 As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned to death, she said to Ahab, “Get up and take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite that he refused to sell you. He is no longer alive, but dead.” 16 When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, he got up and went down to take possession of Naboth’s vineyard.

Ahab didn’t do the deed, but he got the vineyard anyway.

There is a recent book out titled *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in 20th-Century America*. It is by Ira Katznelson. It tells the story of how it came to be that so many of the suburbs in America are exclusively white. Why are so many suburbs overwhelmingly white? Is it just that African Americans prefer living in high crime areas with substandard schools and houses, without much green space, near factories and garbage-strewn roads while whites prefer low crime, bigger homes, better schools and a healthier tax base? Did American housing patterns develop just from simple economics?

Following WWII there was a very generous G.I. Bill given to soldiers who fought in the war. This G.I. Bill enabled soldiers to go to college and it gave soldiers money to buy homes in the emerging suburbs. Much of the capital that launched my parents generation came from the government. But many African Americans, particularly in the South, were denied entrance into the military. So they never received these G.I. benefits that provided the initial capital for whites to attend school and buy homes. And then even if they were in the military and receive G.I. benefits, African Americans were denied admission to most colleges. And many of the neighborhoods were segregated. In fact, banks for years would not lend money to an African American couple who wanted to purchase a home in a white suburb.

Let me make this more personal. Fifteen years ago I moved my family to Westerville to a little neighborhood called Annehurst Village. We were looking for a 4-bedroom, affordable home with some nice trees and a big yard. I noticed immediately as we drove around the neighborhood that there were virtually no blacks. But the home was nice so my wife and I decided to buy there. But over the years I was really surprised that the neighborhood was not more integrated since the houses were really affordable.

But then I discovered that the deed to my home had a restrictive covenant in it that prohibited the house from being sold to someone who was African American. Now that restrictive covenant is unenforceable according to decades old Supreme Court ruling, but the little area I lived in came up with a scheme to perpetuate the racial segregation. The neighborhood formed a community association – The Annehurst Village Association. The Annehurst Village Association claimed the right of first refusal when a person in that community sold their property.

So, if I decided to sell my property to someone that the community judged unacceptable, because of their race, perhaps, unacceptable because of their ethnicity, then the neighborhood association would buy my house at the selling price and sell it to a more acceptable person. I hate the thought that a white man like me plays the role of King Ahab in this story. I have been the passive beneficiary of a massive amount of injustice done to my fellow countrymen. I may not have started these neighborhood associations, I may not be the people who shut the doors to colleges and to the military, I may not have drafted the legislation for the G.I. Bill, but I and millions of people like me just benefit from it all.

And if you are like me, that hurts. It causes me continual pain to read the racial history of America.

SLIDE

What are the assumptions of the unjust?

Look with me at verses 15-16.

SLIDE – 1 Kings 21:15-16

15 As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned to death, she said to Ahab, "Get up and take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite that he refused to sell you. He is no longer alive, but dead. 16 When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, he got up and went down to take possession of Naboth's vineyard.

The assumption on the part of the unjust is that there are only two parties involved in any unjust transaction. The unjust powerful and the weak victim. There are only two parties, the unjust believe. Me as taker and you as victim. We see these assumptions so plainly laid out in Psalm 10. In verse 4, here is what we read:

SLIDE – Ps 10:4

4 In their pride the wicked do not seek him; in all their thoughts there is no room for God.

And in verse 11,

SLIDE – Ps 10:11

11The wicked say to themselves, "God will never notice; he covers his face and never sees."

And in verse 13,

SLIDE – Ps 10:13

13 Why do the wicked revile God? Why do they say to themselves, "He won't call us to account"?

The assumption of the wicked is that there is no third party. There is not a God who sees every act of injustice. There is not a God who holds us accountable. I get to perpetrate my injustice; I can collaborate in injustice; I get to be the beneficiary of injustice; and, I won't be called to account even if I never repent and never try to work for justice. No one will hold the American tourist who travels to another country to have anonymous sex accountable. No one will hold accountable the Indian money lender who beats 10-year old girls so they work faster in the cigarette industry. No one will bring to justice the Arab militia men who burned alive 1000 men, women and children.

And sometimes even we Christians can begin to lose hope. I don't know about you, but sometimes I look out at the world and say, along with the psalmist in verse 1, "Why, Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?"

Don't you feel that way sometimes? You hear these dreadful stories and you say, "Where are you God? Is there anyone who sees? Is there anyone who is going to intervene? Is it just a two-party transaction – the strong and the weak, the taker and the victim?" Sometimes when I listen to the news, I struggle with being a functional atheist. I think, "Is there any justice for the victims of truck bombings in Iraq or for the victims of child abuse here in America?"

SLIDE

What are some partial answers to injustice?

Maybe you have been kept from making a faith commitment to Christ because of all the pain and injustice in the world – your own pain and injustice or the pain and injustice suffered by others.

You know, as we look around the world we know this side of eternity that there are no complete answers. But there are some partial answers. One of the partial answers is that God does see.

SLIDE – Psalm 10:14-18

14 But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand. The victims commit themselves to you; you are the helper of the fatherless. 15 Break the arms of the wicked and the evildoers; call them to account for their wickedness that would not otherwise be found out. 16 The Lord is King for ever and ever; the nations will perish from his land. 17 You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, 18 defending the fatherless and the oppressed, so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror.

There is a God who sees injustice wherever it is practiced in America, in far-off lands. There is a God who sees in the dark, in the backrooms when the doors are shut and bolted. We have a God who not only sees, but another partial answer is that there is a God in heaven who will judge. He will bring about justice. There is coming a day that will be payback-day.

Look with me at 1 Kings 21:17-19,

SLIDE – 1 Kings 21:17-19

17 Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite: 18 "Go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who rules in Samaria. He is now in Naboth's vineyard, where he has gone to take possession of it. 19 Say to him, 'This is what the Lord says: Have you not murdered a man and seized his property?' Then say to him, 'This is what the Lord says: In the place where dogs licked up Naboth's blood, dogs will lick up your blood—yes, yours!'"

SLIDE – 1 Kings 21:19-24

19 Say to him, 'This is what the Lord says: Have you not murdered a man and seized his property?' Then say to him, 'This is what the Lord says: In the place

where dogs licked up Naboth's blood, dogs will lick up your blood—yes, yours!' 20 Ahab said to Elijah, "So you have found me, my enemy!" "I have found you," he answered, "because you have sold yourself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord. 21 He says, 'I am going to bring disaster on you. I will wipe out your descendants and cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel—slave or free. 22 I will make your house like that of Jeroboam son of Nebat and that of Baasha son of Ahijah, because you have aroused my anger and have caused Israel to sin.' 23 "And also concerning Jezebel the Lord says: 'Dogs will devour Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.' 24 "Dogs will eat those belonging to Ahab who die in the city, and the birds will feed on those who die in the country."

The slave holders in India, the sex/tour operators and their clients, the dictators and confiscators of property may assume that there is only two parties to every transaction, but there is a God who will intervene and judge.

You say, "But what about now? What about now?"

Right now, friend, God has chosen to arrange the world in such a way that he chiefly limits himself to work in and through people. The way God mostly deals with injustice now is that he sends people to intervene on behalf of the victims.

Sometimes as you look at the scope of the massive injustice in the world, you say,

SLIDE

What difference can one person make?

Let me tell you about one woman and then I'll finish. There is a woman named Zana Briski, who is a British-born photojournalist and went to Calcutta in 1997. While there she visited the red light district in Calcutta with its brothels and other illegal businesses. She kept going back to see about photographing the prostitutes. She spent countless hours with the women getting to know them. And ultimately she convinced one of the brothel owners to rent her a room.

But while she lived in this brothel, she got to know the children of the prostitutes. And the children were fascinated by her camera. And so it occurred to her that it would be an incredible thing to be able to see the world through the eyes of these Indian children of prostitutes. So she got these Indian children cameras. She taught them how to take pictures, and then let them loose.

And there is the most wonderful documentaries that I've ever seen. It is titled "Born into Brothels." It won an Academy Award for Best Documentary. It won the Audience Award at the Cannes Film Festival. I want you to see a clip of these kids and some of their photos and catch a glimpse of their lives.

SLIDE – Born Into Brothels

What difference can one person make regarding injustice in this world? Reach into your bulletins for just a moment. In your bulletin there is an insert and there are a bunch of organizations listed – ministries many of which were started by people in this church. For example, if you look down at Thirst Relief, there is a guy in our church named Jim Hicks, who woke up four years ago in the middle of the night with a sense from God that God was speaking to him. A few words formed in his mind. One word was “thirst” and the other was “pure water.” He felt like the Lord was speaking to him about starting an organization to fight injustice and bring health to people around the world.

He wrote down these words – thirst and pure water – and went back to sleep. Then he began to do some research the next day. And he started to learn about the world’s water crisis; how over a billion people in the world don’t have access to clean water.

Here is what I call the Tripe A Method of making change in the world

SLIDE

The Triple A approach

First he became aware that there was a need.

SLIDE

Awareness

Then he appealed to God.

SLIDE

Awareness

Appeal

And then he took action.

SLIDE

Awareness

Appeal

Action

Triple A – awareness, appeal and action – this is the way it will work in your life. He started a little organization called Thirst Relief. He combined with some other folks and they build a filter for water that could be used anywhere in the world. And in the last two years they’ve been able to manufacture this filter at a very low cost, give it to missionaries in different places of the world, and they’ve brought clean water to 20,000 people in the last two years.

Their bottled water is on sale in our café – Thirst Relief. All of the proceeds go to support this ministry.

Here is what I would like to ask you to do. Let's go through this list:

Global Initiatives

- ***Hear the Cry***
A non-profit organization started by Vineyard Columbus to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa.
Contact Andrew Oswalt at hope@hearthecry.org
www.hearthecry.org
- ***Thirst Relief International***
A non-profit organization started by Vineyard Columbus members to battle injustice, poverty, HIV and death by providing long-term pure water solutions to those in need around the world.
See table in the lobby or go to their website at www.thirstrelief.org
- ***Bread for the World***
Bread for the World is a nationwide Christian movement that seeks justice for the world's hungry people by lobbying our nation's decision makers.
www.bread.org
- ***Heifer International***
A non-profit organization designed to help end world hunger and poverty by giving training and animals to children and families so that they become self-reliant and self-sustained.
www.heifer.org
- ***Pura Vida Coffee***
A Christian coffee company in Costa Rica that empowers coffee producers while helping more than 500 at-risk-children in Costa Rica by providing education and by serving over 30,000 meals each year. Help Pura Vida by purchasing coffee beans in our café.
www.puravidacoffee.org
- ***Invisible Children***
Invisible Children improves the quality of life for war-affected children by providing access to quality education, enhanced learning environments, and innovative economic opportunities for the community.
www.invisiblechildren.com

Local Initiatives

- ***Pro-Life***

Assist women in crisis pregnancies to save the lives of their unborn children through mentoring and practical provision. Contact Diane Bauman at 614.259.5318 or stop by the table in the lobby.

- ***New Name Ministry***

This is an outreach to share the love and grace of God to women trapped in the sex industry. Contact Sara Carlisle at 259.5397 for more information.

- ***Women's Prison Ministry***

Bring the love of Jesus to women in three prisons and a shelter. Opportunities to serve exist inside and outside of prison. Contact Deb Scott at 614.259.5348

- ***Vineyard Community Center***

Join us next weekend at the **Community Center Fair** to learn how you can be involved in justice issues such as citizenship classes, English as a Second Language, Career Development, and much more.

- ***Food Pantry – 181 E. 5th Street***

Help bag and distribute food, offer prayer, or share the gospel at our free food pantry. Call Cyndia Garris at 614.259.5441 to get involved.

- ***Rebecca's Place Women's Shelter***

Join us in preparing and serving a meal for the women of this shelter. Let God use you to impact the lives of these women. Call Cyndia Garris at 614.259.5441 to get involved.

- ***Habitat For Humanity***

Join with community volunteers to help build houses for people in need. No experience necessary! Contact Gayle and Ken at 889.7719 to be involved.

- ***Prison – Marion Juvenile Correction Facility***

Participate in small group studies with young men in this prison. Contact John at 578.8371

- ***The Zone***

It could be said that the civil rights issue of our time is the academic achievement gap existing between minority students and their more affluent peers. Help all students obtain an excellent education by joining the leaders in the Zone Afterschool Program. Call Helen Cosner at 259.5244

I'm going to ask you to do just one thing. Pray to God and say to God, "Is there one area that you would have me assist in in fighting injustice – just one thing?"

Perhaps the Lord would speak to you as he has Marlene and me about adopting some children through a relief agency and providing those children with an education, or food, or housing. Perhaps he would speak to you about getting involved in an organization that deals with global sex trafficking. Perhaps God would speak to you about getting involved in an organization that provides medical care for AIDS victims in Sub-Saharan Africa. Or locally, get involved in an organization like Fruit of the Vine that gives food to hungry people in our community. Or perhaps God would fill your heart with a fresh idea like he did with Jim Hicks, or Zana Briski, the photojournalist who did *Born into Brothels*.

The Triple A Method – become aware of an area of deep need; appeal to God and as you appeal to God, God will deepen your heart regarding that need. And then ACT – do something! Make a difference on behalf of those who struggle to believe that there is any help for them, that there's any justice for them. Imagine friends, if the 7000 of us what made up the Vineyard all decided to do one thing to challenge injustice in this world. Let's pray.

The Challenge of Injustice

Rich Nathan

August 18-19, 2007

1 and 2 Kings: Facing Life's Challenges

1 Kings 21

I. Stories of Unjust Takings

II. What is Injustice? (1 Kings 21.1-7)

III. What are the Techniques of Injustice? (1 Kings 21.8-14; Ps. 10)

IV. What Roles Do People Play in Working Injustice? (1 Kings 21.8-16)

- A. Perpetrators
- B. Collaborators
- C. Beneficiaries

V. What are the Assumptions of the Unjust? (Ps. 10.4, 11, 13)

VI. What are Some Partial Answers to Injustice? (1 Kings 21.17-24)

VII. What Difference Can One Person Make?

- A. The Triple A Approach