

April 24, 2016

Animal Planet
Jezebel's Dogs
2 Kings 9:30-37

Opening words: Nobel Prize winner Anatole France once said, "*Until one is loved by an animal, a part of one's soul remains unawakened.*" As an animal lover myself, I can agree with that quote. There has never been a time when animals were not part of my home. In my home right now I have two pets. Madelyn, who is very smart and has us well trained, is a long haired white cat. Macy, the best dog in the world, is my thirteen-inch beagle. You know it is true. We consider our pets part of our family.

Have you ever stopped to consider how many animals are found in the Bible? This is sermon number three in my four-part sermon series, *Animal Planet*. Two weeks ago, we looked at Daniel's lions. That story is about faith and courage. Last week, we looked at Balaam's donkey. It is a story about communicating or discerning. Next week, Communion Sunday, we are going to look at Moses' calf. It is a story about priorities. Today, we are going to look at Jezebel's dogs. It is a story about accountability or judgment.

Our scripture reading for today comes from Second Kings. There was a time when First Kings and Second Kings were united and simply called Kings. It was divided into two literary pieces about the year 400. The division comes chronologically. King Ahab, the northern king, reigned at the same time as Jehoshaphat, the southern king. It is Ahab that grabs our attention this morning. He is remembered as one of the worst kings because he encouraged the people to abandon the one true God (Yahweh) and worship the false god, Baal. The one who encouraged him to worship Baal was his wife and queen, Jezebel. Our scripture lesson for today, 2 Kings 9:30-37, tells us that Jezebel paid for that sin. Let me call today's message *Jezebel's Dogs*.

2 Kings 9:30-37 ³⁰ Then Jehu went to Jezreel. When Jezebel heard about it, she put on eye makeup, arranged her hair and looked out of a window. ³¹ As Jehu entered the gate, she asked, "Have you come in peace, you Zimri, you murderer of your master?" ³² He looked up at the window and called out, "Who is on my side? Who?" Two or three eunuchs looked down at him. ³³ "Throw her down!" Jehu said. So they threw her down, and some of her blood splattered the wall and the horses as they trampled her underfoot. ³⁴ Jehu went in and ate and drank. "Take care of that cursed woman," he said, "and bury her, for she was a king's daughter." ³⁵ But when they went out to bury her, they found nothing except her skull, her feet and her hands. ³⁶ They went back and told Jehu, who said, "This is the word of the LORD that he spoke through his servant Elijah the Tishbite: On the plot of ground at Jezreel dogs will devour Jezebel's flesh.

³⁷ Jezebel's body will be like dung on the ground in the plot at Jezreel, so that no one will be able to say, 'This is Jezebel.'"

C. S. Lewis once declared there are three surprises waiting for us in heaven. The first is who is there. The second is who isn't there. The third is that we are there. That declaration always makes me think. If it makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

The main character in this morning's scripture reading is Jezebel. The Bible gives us certain facts about her life. She was a Phoenician princess, daughter of King Tyre. In time, she would marry King Ahab of the northern kingdom. Together, they would have three children. Jezebel, to say the least, was ambitious. She wanted more than the perks that came with the crown; she wanted influence. She influenced her husband to commit the most heinous of sins. Do you remember the story? For countless reasons, God could have walked away from his Chosen People but he didn't do it. Instead, he valued his relationship with them. The people rewarded his love by walking away from Him. Led by King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, the people walked away from God to worship another, Baal. There is no other way to say it. Jezebel was a sinner, so her death was not pleasant. The scripture lesson for today is her unpleasant ending.

According to the text, Jezebel is in the city of Jezreel, an ancient fortress. She is locked in a power struggle with the new king of Israel, Jehu. He is coming to seize his power, but Jezebel will not surrender easily. She wants to stay in control, so she puts on her womanly armor, make-up and twisted hair. She climbs a high tower to survey the situation. She calls out to the new king, but their words are few. Those surrounding the former queen choose their side. They throw Jezebel out of the tower's window and her beauty is quickly forgotten. I hate to say it, but it is Bible. Her blood covers everything in the vicinity. Emotionally unmoved by her death, the new king leaves to eat supper. When he returns to the scene, he discovers her body has been consumed by the dogs. The next line is painful to both say and hear. The only thing that remained of the former queen was her skull, hands and feet. I am not sure what was said. "Bad dog" just doesn't seem strong enough. The new king was at the scene of the crime. He saw the ugliness and knew it was pleasing to God. Our world has always been an ugly place.

There is no other way to say it. The story of Jezebel's death is ugly. It was written to be ugly because the author wants to grab our attention. He wants to remind us of two things. First, he wants to remind us that sin, itself, is serious business. In our time, we do not take sin seriously. We are theologically preoccupied with God's love for us, so we don't worry about sinning. We just don't like the consequences of sin. How much hardship have you endured because of an unholy lifestyle? We are supposed to be a little more like Jesus every day. Second, he wants to remind us that someday we will be judged. We will be judged for the things we have done - sins of commission. We will be judged for the things we should have done - sins of omission. How much human suffering have you ignored? If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

On April 6 of last year, I had surgery. I know the date because it was the day after Easter. It was nothing major. I had hernia surgery. I had it done at Northside Hospital by a local doctor. Hidden behind Easter, it was a well-kept secret. For the life of me, I still don't know how I developed a hernia. I am far too young and do next to no physical labor. Maybe I wouldn't have gotten a hernia if the Bible had less than 65 books! Someone asked me, "Why didn't you tell anyone you were having hernia surgery?" The answer is obvious. I didn't want to hear 600 hernia stories. I am sure your hernia story is just fascinating, but not everyone's hernia story is so interesting. I didn't want to see your scars. I didn't want to hear about someone's brother-in-law's hernia surgery that turned fatal. I didn't want to field everyone's questions. I didn't want to hear your opinions about my doctor. I didn't want you to diagnose me before or after the surgery. I know you went to the school of hard knocks, but I have never seen your degree from medical school. I just didn't want to hear it. It isn't just me, it's everyone.

Can I ask you two questions? This is my first question: Why do we feel like we have the license to explore someone else's physical health? We just can't get enough information. We just can't wait to share our opinion and give our advice. Who made you an expert on medical matters? Years ago, I learned a simple truth. There is a very thin line between being nosy and being concerned. Are you more nosy or concerned? This is second question: Why are we so concerned about someone else's physical health, and so unconcerned about others' spiritual health? One of the great things about Methodism is accountability. In other words, we are supposed to be concerned about another's spiritual health. Just like Jezebel, our day is coming. Each one of us will stand before God and be held accountable. The goal of Methodism is not just to get you into heaven. The goal of Methodism is to get everyone into heaven. It just wouldn't be the same without you!

Today, I want to challenge you. My challenge is not to get you to ask fewer physical questions. However, that would be nice. My challenge is to get you to ask more spiritual questions. After all, we are the church, a spiritual organization. Do we not ask spiritual questions because we don't care, or does our lack of spiritual questions reveal our spiritual immaturity? We just don't know what to ask. Historically, Methodists have always asked spiritual questions. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, asked the early Methodists 21 different spiritual questions. You are getting off easy. I just want you to ask five spiritual questions. They are not original. They came from Christian author Neil Cole. When was the last time you asked someone these questions?

- 1. What is the condition of your soul?** In other words, are you at peace with God? Do you understand God's plan of salvation? It all revolves around our resurrected savior, Jesus. Your salvation cannot be earned. We are saved by grace and by grace alone. What is the condition of your soul? If you have an answer to that question, say, "**Amen!**"

- 2. What sin do you need to confess?** What dark part of your life do you need to bring into the light? Everyone has something. There isn't a perfect person in this world. Confession is good for the soul and it is pleasing to God. What do you need to confess? If you have an answer to that question, say, **"Amen!"**
- 3. What have you held back from God that you need to surrender?** God expects you to make him the top priority in your life. Any other relationship or possession must be second. When it comes to God, you are all in or you are all out. What are you holding back from God? If you have an answer to that question, say, **"Amen!"**
- 4. Is there anything that has dampened your zeal for Christ?** In other words, are you excited about Jesus, or are you just mildly interested? There is a world of difference between being a fan of Jesus and a true disciple. Are you passionately in love with Jesus, or are you just mildly interested in Jesus? What is dampening your zeal for Christ? If you have an answer to that question, say, **"Amen!"**
- 5. Who have you talked with about Jesus this week?** Are you more comfortable talking about Jesus, or the organizational church? You should be able to tell people what Jesus means to you. You should be able to tell people what Jesus has done for you. You should be able to tell people how Jesus has changed your life. Who have you talked with about Jesus this week? If you have an answer to that question, say, **"Amen!"** I challenge you to not just answer those questions. I challenge you to ask the people in your life those spiritual questions. The goal is to get everyone into heaven.

On Wednesday night, the church hosted a human trafficking awareness session for the community. In my opinion, it is one of the best things we have done in several years. If you see Linda Martin, thank her. She did a good job of organizing the event. Several law enforcement officers were here to educate us. Human trafficking is the newest form of slavery. It has been identified as the largest human rights violation in the history of mankind. It can't be ignored. Consider these sad facts with me:

- There are 27 million slaves in our world today. That's the highest recorded number of slaves in the history of the world.
- The average cost of a slave around the world is \$90.
- Human trafficking is the second largest criminal activity in the world, behind drug smuggling and arms dealing.
- 80% of human trafficking involves sexual exploitation. 19% involves labor exploitation.
- The average age of a young woman being trafficked is 12-14 years.
- Every year an estimated 1,078 Ohio children become victims.

Those facts came from an organization called Live58. I hate to say it, but we live in one of the hotbeds of human trafficking behavior.

I had an emotional hangover from our session. I thought about my children. I am thankful they are self-sufficient adults and I am thankful I know where they are. I can't imagine the emotional torment the victims feel. I can't imagine the emotional torment the victim's parents feel. I don't know how you sleep at night not knowing the location of your children. I don't know how you live the rest of your life not knowing the location of your children. I don't know how you could enjoy a single second without your children.

If it is true in this world, then it is true in heaven. The goal of this church is not just to get you into heaven. The goal of this church is to get everyone into heaven. I'm glad my children's salvation is guaranteed. Heaven wouldn't be the same without them. Heaven wouldn't be the same without you! Who are you going to look for in heaven?

Will you pray with me?