

Prophet, what will you say?

I. What people want to hear?

II. What God reveals to be the truth?

*10 Dressed in their royal robes, the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah were sitting on their thrones at the threshing floor by the entrance of the gate of Samaria, with all the prophets prophesying before them. 11 Now Zedekiah son of Kenaanah had made iron horns and he declared, "This is what the Lord says: 'With these you will gore the Arameans until they are destroyed.'" 12 All the other prophets were prophesying the same thing. "Attack Ramoth Gilead and be victorious," they said, "for the Lord will give it into the king's hand." 13 The messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah said to him, "Look, the other prophets without exception are predicting success for the king. Let your word agree with theirs, and speak favorably." 14 But Micaiah said, "As surely as the Lord lives, I can tell him only what the Lord tells me." 15 When he arrived, the king asked him, "Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or not?" "Attack and be victorious," he answered, "for the Lord will give it into the king's hand." 16 The king said to him, "How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?" 17 Then Micaiah answered, "I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and the Lord said, 'These people have no master. Let each one go home in peace.'" 18 The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Didn't I tell you that he never prophesies anything good about me, but only bad?" 19 Micaiah continued, "Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne with all the multitudes of heaven standing around him on his right and on his left. 20 And the Lord said, 'Who will entice Ahab into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there?' "One suggested this, and another that. 21 Finally, a spirit came forward, stood before the Lord and said, 'I will entice him.' 22 "'By what means?' the Lord asked. "'I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all his prophets,' he said. "'You will succeed in enticing him,' said the Lord. 'Go and do it.' 23 "So now the Lord has put a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours. The Lord has decreed disaster for you." 24 Then Zedekiah son of Kenaanah went up and slapped Micaiah in the face. "Which way did the spirit from the Lord go when he went from me to speak to you?" he asked. 25 Micaiah replied, "You will find out on the day you go to hide in an inner room." 26 The king of Israel then ordered, "Take Micaiah and send him back to Amon the ruler of the city and to Joash the king's son 27 and say, 'This is what the king says: Put this fellow in prison and give him nothing but bread and water until I return safely.'" 28 Micaiah declared, "If you ever return safely, the Lord has not spoken through me." Then he added, "Mark my words, all you people!"*

Tell me, have you ever been in a situation where you felt pressured to say what everyone else wanted you to say, or think what everyone else wanted you to think? Maybe you're feeling that right now, in light of what's going on in our nation lately. Maybe you're feeling like you've got to say just the right thing about Black Lives Matter, or social injustice or race relations. There's a lot of pressure to say what the crowd wants to hear. You maybe saw that a lot in the news lately. If someone dared to speak against the crowd, they got shouted down, pushed aside, banned from the Internet or worse. Or maybe you've experienced the flip side of that coin. Times when you wanted to say something. Something you knew to be true, something you firmly believed in, but you couldn't say it for fear that someone would object, or be offended or unfriend you. And so you're left feeling stuck between the desire to be liked, to be accepted by others, and the desire to speak and hold to the truth, especially as it relates to what God says is the truth.

You realize, you and I are not the only ones who have ever faced that kind of tug of war. 2800 years ago a man by the name of Micaiah face a similar situation. Micaiah was a prophet.

Maybe not a famous prophet. He didn't have any books of the Bible named after him. In fact, you've maybe never heard his name till I read it just moments ago. But Micaiah was a man we can all relate to. Because he faced a dilemma we've all faced. Micaiah had to decide whether he was going to tell people what they wanted to hear or was he going to tell them the truth?

You realize, that to a certain extent, we all stand in Micaiah's shoes. God has called us as Christians to speak the truth in love. The Bible says that *we are Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.* (1 Cor. 5:20). In a sense, we all have an opportunity to speak for God. You might say that we are all like little prophets. The question is—and this is our theme for today:

Prophet, what will you say?

I. Will you say what people want to hear?

II. Or will you say what God reveals as the truth?

Okay, I have a confession to make. The account we are about to study—I don't remember ever studying this before. I know it wasn't one of my Sunday school lessons. And maybe I was dozing off when we covered it at the Seminary, but when I started really digging into this account in preparation for this week's sermon, I found it fascinating, with tons of applications for our lives. In fact, I'd encourage you, sometime today, to read all of 1 Kings, chapter 22. This is good stuff.

The chapter centers around an event in the life of King Ahab. You maybe remember that Ahab was one of the most wicked kings in the history of the northern tribes of Israel. Ahab, for example, was the one who plotted with his wife Jezebel to steal Naboth's Vineyard, by having that innocent man put to death. And it was Ahab and his 400 priests of Baal who had that showdown with Elijah on Mount Carmel and lost miserably.

Well, it's that same Ahab who in the opening verses of this chapter announces that he wants to go to war against the king of Aram and recapture the city of Ramoth Gilead. Ahab calls on Jehoshaphat, the king of the Southern tribes of Judah, to assist him in this military campaign. Jehoshaphat agrees but first demands that King Ahab, "*First seek the counsel of the Lord.*" (1 Kings 22:5). In other words, Jehoshaphat, who was a believer in the true God, first wanted to know whether God thought it was a good idea to be invading this enemy city.

Remarkably, Ahab, who was not a believer in the true God, but who probably wanted to cover his bets, agreed to seek the advice of the Lord. In v. 6 of chapter 22 we read, *So the king of Israel brought together the prophets—about 400 men—and asked them, "Shall I go to war against Ramoth Gilead or shall I refrain?"* The answer the prophets gave him? "*Go, for the Lord will give it into the king's hand.*"

Now, at that point, Ahab's probably thinking, "Awesome! God just gave me the green light to attack the city!" But Jehoshaphat is thinking, "Wait a minute. Not so fast, Ahab." You see, Jehoshaphat was suspicious of this group of so-called prophets of the Lord that Ahab had gathered around him. He was suspicious that these men were only telling the king what he wanted to hear. I mean, remember King Ahab had already come right out and said, "I want to attack that city." So what does Jehoshaphat say? "*Is there not a prophet of the Lord here whom we can inquire of?*" In other words, "Can we get a real prophet in here, as opposed to all these 'Yes men' that Ahab has surrounded himself with?"

Ahab's answer? *The king of Israel answered Jehoshaphat, "There is still one man through whom we can inquire of the Lord, but I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad."* In other words, "Yeah, there's one guy, but he never tells me what I want to hear. He's always telling me what I'm doing wrong"—which if you look at

Ahab's lifestyle, you see why that would be the case. But in the end Ahab relents and sends for the prophet Micaiah.

Really, that's where our text for today picks up. Both kings are dressed in their royal robes, sitting on their thrones, awaiting the arrival of Micaiah, all while this mob of 400 prophets is gathered around them, continuing to prophesy to the King, "*Attack Ramoth Gilead and be victorious, for the Lord will give it into the king's hands.*" In fact, one of the prophets even used a prop to support that message. Verse 11 reads, *Now Zedekiah son of Kenaanah had made iron horns and he declared, "This is what the Lord says: 'With these you will gore the Arameans until they are destroyed.'*" Can you just picture this scene? A guy running around with horns pumping up the king, pumping up the crowd. It reminds me of a pep rally where everyone is shouting, "Are you ready? Yah! Really ready? Yah!" Who doesn't want to jump on to that bandwagon?

Now contrast that scene with the lone prophet Micaiah who is now making his way into the presence of the king. But before he gets there, the man who had gone to fetch Micaiah had a little advice for the prophet. We read, *The messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah said to him, "Look, the other prophets without exception are predicting success for the king. Let your word agree with them and speak favorably."* How's that for a little peer pressure? "Listen buddy, you'd better stick to the script. If you know what's good for you, you'll toe the company line. Don't be raining on anyone's parade. Don't be breaking ranks. Just say what we tell you to say. Tell the king what he wants to hear. And Micaiah's response? "*As surely as the Lord lives, I can tell him only what the Lord tells me.*" In other words, Micaiah says, "What everybody else is saying is irrelevant. The only thing that really matters is what God says."

So when Micaiah finally stands before the king, the king asks him, "*Shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or not?*" Micaiah's answer? "*Attack and be victorious, for the Lord will give it into the king's hand.* Wait a minute. Micaiah just parroted what all the other false prophets had been saying. So, does that mean that Micaiah gave in to the pressure of the mob? He told the king what he wanted to hear? Or does it mean that the Lord really did want Ahab to attack the city? He really was going to give the city into the king's hands? Actually, the answer is, it's neither.

In order to understand Micaiah's statement, we need to read between the lines a bit. Apparently when Micaiah repeated that very same line that all the other prophets had used, he did it in such a way that even King Ahab realized he was not being sincere. I don't know, maybe Micaiah rolled his eyes and spoke with all the sarcasm he could muster. "Go ahead King, attack. Be victorious. I'm sure the Lord will give it into your hands." However Micaiah said it, the king was not buying what Micaiah was selling. We know that to be the case from the way that Ahab responded to Micaiah's prophecy. The king says, "*How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?*" Now that's ironic, almost humorous, that this unbeliever was demanding that Micaiah tell him the truth in the name of the Lord. Ahab never really wanted to know the truth before, but now he does. So the Lord's Prophet gives the king what he's asking for, namely, the truth. Micaiah says, "*I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and the Lord said, 'These people have no master. Let each one go home in peace.'*" In other words, Micaiah foretold that Israel would soon be without a king because Ahab would lose his life in the battle against Ramoth Gilead. The Lord's prophet told King Ahab the truth.

Ahab's response? He complains to Jehoshaphat, "*Didn't I tell you that he never prophesies anything good about me, but only bad?*" But Micaiah doesn't stop there. He goes on to describe this vision that he has of God seated on his throne surrounded by all his angels. And

in it, God announces that the time has come for Ahab to die and that his death would occur in the battle for Ramoth Gilead. But then God asks this question, “*So who is going to entice Ahab to go into battle?*” There’s some discussion among the angels and finally one spirit steps forward and says, “I’ll do it.” In this case, that spirit is an evil spirit. It’s the Devil. And so God says to Satan, “So how are you going to do it, Satan? How are you going to lure Ahab to his death?” Listen to the answer Satan gives: “*I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all his prophets.*”

You realize, that statement is still being fulfilled to this very day. Satan is still going out and being a deceiving spirit in the mouths of prophets today. All around the world there are teachers and professors, pastors and religious leaders who are deceiving people. Many of them say they are from God. But they are not speaking the truth. Instead they are telling people what they want to hear. For example, they’re saying things like, “God wants you to have it all. So name it and claim it. If you’re not healthy and wealthy, it’s because you don’t have enough faith.” Or they are telling people, “Nobody’s born evil by nature. We’re just corrupted by the world around us. Nobody’s truly sinful. It’s just that some people make poor choices.” They say, “If we do our best to live by the Golden Rule, God will reward us with Heaven—because there’s really no such place as hell.”

You realize, those are all lies. Popular lies, yes. But lies none the less. The question is, how do we keep from falling for those lies, or condoning them in others, or even promoting them ourselves? The answer is found in the words and actions of the prophet Micaiah. Micaiah recognized that there is a major difference between telling Ahab what he wanted to hear and telling him what God had revealed. One was a lie and the other was the truth.

The same thing is still true today. The human heart is filled with lies. We deceive ourselves in so many ways. Scripture says, *the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9)*. If left to our own desires, our own logic, or the rationalization of others, we would never discover the truth. But in his infinite love and mercy, God, the creator of the universe, has revealed his truth not here (in the heart), or here (in the mind), but here (in his Word). Here God reveals the truth about ourselves. In the harsh light of his holy law, he reveals how often our actions have not followed our confession. We’ve not spoken up for our beliefs or given into peer pressure. We failed to let our light shine. God reveals our sin in his holy word. But God not only reveals the truth about who we are. He reveals the truth about who he is. As God described himself to Moses, “*I am the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. (Exodus 34 6-7)*.”

My friends, deep down, every human being wants to know that God, the God who doesn’t judge us according to the color of our skin, the God who does not treat us as our sins deserve, the God who gave his Son to make us members of his family. By God’s grace alone, he’s revealed himself to us. And now God has made us His prophets, to go and share that truth about God to others. Not in an arrogant or boastful way, but rather, as one beggar telling another beggar where to find the bread. Where to find the Truth. Where to find eternal life. Dear Christians, God has made you His prophets. Go and tell people not what they think they want to hear, tell them what deep down in your heart of hearts, you know they need to hear. Tell them about the love that God has for all, in Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.