

1 Kings 22:1-38 – To Tell the Truth

"There are moments in history when a single person takes a stand so firm, they change the course of the world. The church in the fourth century was reeling from a popular heresy which claimed that Jesus was not fully God. The pressure to compromise was immense, and at one point, it seemed that almost every church leader had caved to the idea.

But there was one man who refused to yield. His name was Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, and his unwavering conviction earned him the famous nickname, "*Athanasius contra mundum*"—Athanasius against the world.

He was exiled five different times by four different Roman emperors.

Yet, every time, he found his way back, standing tall for the truth that Jesus is the divine Son of God.

Turn with me to 1 Kings 22. We've been studying through the life of Elijah (which centers on the fact that he was the lone voice that spoke truth to evil King Ahab and his wife Jezebel).

Today we're going to focus on another truth teller – one you have likely never heard of, a prophet by the name of Micaiah – whose stand for truth also had great impact – even though he stood alone.

Pray

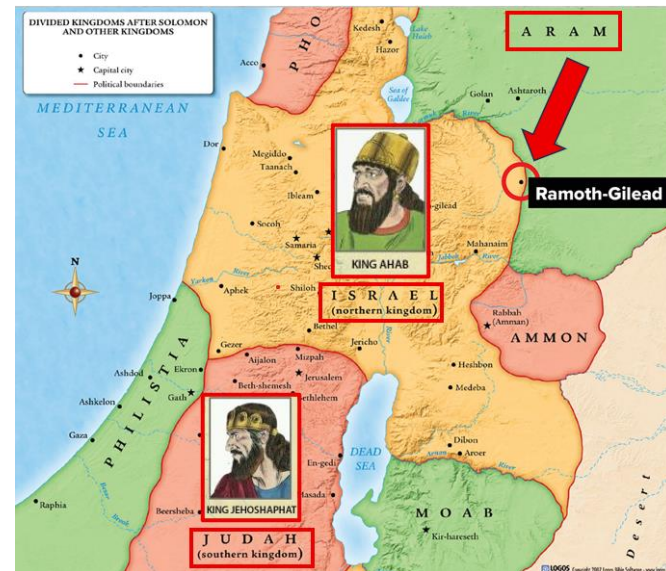
Verses 1-3

For three years there was no war between Aram and Israel. ²But in the third year Jehoshaphat king of Judah

went down to see the king of Israel. ³The king of Israel had said to his officials, "Don't you know that Ramoth Gilead belongs to us and yet we are doing nothing to retake it from the king of Aram?"

⁴So he asked Jehoshaphat, "Will you go with me to fight against Ramoth Gilead?"

So we have two kings (MAP).



One is wicked Ahab whom the Bible says "was more wicked than every king that lived before him. A man who did not listen to the voice of God." And we have Jehoshaphat, whom the Bible regards as a good king, and a godly man whose "heart was devoted to the ways of the Lord" (2 Chronicles 17:4-6) who wants to see Israel and Judah reunited after years of division, and yet his desire for peace with his neighbor to the north brought to him great peril as he entered into a relationship with Ahab who did not share his core values.

The center of the conflict is a city called “Ramoth Gilead.”

(The back story is simply this – three years earlier, the nation of Aram had pushed down from the north and attacked the nation of Israel and taken several of its cities. When the conflict was over, Israel had won back its independence, and Aram agreed to give back all of the cities it had taken. All of the cities – except one – Ramoth Gilead, a city on the border, a valuable and strategic city. And Ahab wants it back! (By the way – it was a dispute that continues even to this day over what’s known as the Golan Heights).

Jehoshaphat replied to the king of Israel, “I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses.”

⁵But Jehoshaphat also said to the king of Israel, “First seek the counsel of the Lord.”

Now, as much as anything, I think that tells us where his heart was. But you notice something about the point at which he asks?

And I think perhaps there is a caution here about the ordering of our decisions.

As humans we have this tendency to make plans, and says, “God, I need your blessing.”

While instead we should say, “Lord, you show me what you would have me to do. Show me your way, and then I’ll get behind you.”

(And I’m guessing we’ve all made decisions in our own strength and judgement, only later to say, “If I had only sought the will of the Lord, first – it sure would have saved a lot of grief.”) (ANBYODY BEEN THERE?)

Jehoshaphat seeks the counsel of the Lord – but unfortunately, Ahab has his own way of making decisions that does not involve seeking God’s will at all.

⁶So the king of Israel brought together the prophets—about four hundred men—and asked them, “Shall I go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain?”

“Go,” they answered, “for the Lord will give it into the king’s hand.” (In unison, all 400 says, “Go - it’s not even going to be close.”)

⁷But Jehoshaphat asked, “Is there no longer a prophet of the Lord here whom we can inquire of?”

You think he buys it? Absolutely not! He’s spiritually attuned enough to know that the word of God does not come with the message, “Everything’s great – you’re okay just the way you are.”

In fact, Jehoshaphat has a level of discernment that sounds a lot like the Apostle Paul who writes, “Do not treat prophesy as if it were unimportant. But test everything’ (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21, NCV).

Or John who writes,

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4:1).

And so . . . ⁸The king of Israel answered Jehoshaphat, “There is still one prophet through whom we can inquire of the Lord, but I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad. He is Micaiah son of Imlah.”

“The king should not say such a thing,” Jehoshaphat replied.

“There’s this guy who doesn’t tell me what I want to hear. But I hate him.” Why? “He never tells me to do what I want to do.”

⁹ So the king of Israel called one of his officials and said, “Bring Micaiah son of Imlah at once.”

¹⁰ Dressed in their royal robes, the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah were sitting on their thrones (KEY WORD) at the threshing floor by the entrance of the gate of Samaria, with all the prophets prophesying before them. (The prophets are parading in front of them, and there’s this one guy named Zedekiah who brings some visual aids to the moemnt. He comes with props and puts on a skit).

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.’” (He’s got the horns, he’s very dramatic. He’s running around in front of these two kings like a Broadway play . . . and on stage with him his cast of 399)

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.” (And we can read between the lines, right? “If you know what’s good for you, you’ll

what? Agree too! Otherwise, “HOUSTON, WE HAVE A PROBLEM!”)

Verse 14-16

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.”

So what’s going on? I thought he was a truth teller.

Well, apparently all indications are – he was speaking sarcastically. He says, “Sure, go! You’re gonna do great! It’s all gonna work our wonderfully!

But – Micaiah can’t play this game with a straight face.

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?”

Jehoshaphat says, “okay, okay, you can cut it with the satire. I want to know the truth!”

17-18

¹⁷ Then Micaiah answered (HERE IT IS), “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.’” (Micaiah says, “Everything you just heard, was fake news!”)

¹⁸ The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “Didn’t I tell you that he never prophesies anything good about me, but only bad?”

And then – we have one of the most amazing exchanges in all of God’s word. There are a handful of times in Scripture when the curtain is pulled back, and we get ushered into the spiritual realm and see what’s going on in heavenly realms:

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.”

(Now – we could spend hours on this alone) – but I’ll get to the chase:

There’s a conversation going on, on earth, and there’s a conversation going on in heaven.

Earth has a throne (remember Ahab and Jehoshaphat sitting on a throne?), and heaven has a throne.

And Micaiah says, “I’ve appealed to a higher authority than you, and I saw a throne far greater than yours.

So what is going on? There is this sense in scripture, that

1. If you have been told (and Ahab has); and
2. If you won’t listen (and Ahab won’t); and
3. If you are bound and determined to act against the clear direction of God (and Ahab did) –

to bring God’s plan to fulfillment, God will hasten it’s coming.

So if you want to live a lie, if you are bound and determined to thwart God’s plan, God will say, “Here you go! Have at it! And give us over to the destructive desires of our hearts.”

And you see, there’s this dangerous space we can live in, where friends have told you, and family has told you, and consequences have told you, and pain has told you, and broken promises have told you, and tears have told you – and you’re still not listening.

And it’s a danger zone, because your heart is getting harder day by day, and the voice of God is becoming but a whisper.

Listen to Psalm 146:9 - God “frustrates the plans of the wicked.”

God catches the wicked in their own devices and leads his enemies into the very traps they set.

Listen to this:

¹⁰. . . wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. ¹¹For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie ¹²and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12).

Notice - first – you make the choice to continue living an evil life – a life of rebellion to God’s authority. (It breaks God’s heart).

But if you are bent on lies, falsehood, and deception – God will sometimes hasten the end of things, so he can get on with his righteous will for his people.

And here’s God – he’s so patient, so loving – even with Ahab – he’s sent the prophet Elijah to him on multiple occasions – even changed the weather forecast to get his attention – and now one final appeal from Micaiah, who even pulls the curtain of heaven back to show him cosmic power. But Ahab is not, will not – refuses to listen!

And so Micaiah – he’s a truth teller.

But when you take a stand against the crowd – don’t expect it to always go down easy:

²⁴Then 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. ²⁵Micaiah replied, “You will find out on the day you go to hide in an inner room.”

So I need to say this: if you’re going to speak the truth, you’ll have some people who won’t like you. (I’m not talking about being a jerk, by the way. Micaiah was never rude, he was never out of order; he never shouts. He’s not the guy that would name call and berates somebody on social media).

BUT – he tells the truth. And when you tell the truth, sometimes that puts a target on your back.

The Apostle Paul asks this question in Galatians 4:16, “Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?”

Listen – if you have just one person who will love you enough to be honest and truthful with you, even when it hurts – you need to thank God! Because that’s not your enemy. (You believe a lie when you reason that they’re the enemy and your own sinful heart is a friend.)

But here’s Micaiah, and here’s what he does – and what all truth tellers do – he just keeps telling the truth, regardless of the consequences.

²⁶The 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 ²⁷and say, ‘This is what the king says: Put this fellow in prison and give him nothing but bread and water until I return safely.’”

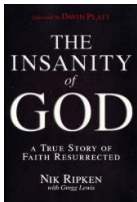
²⁸Micaiah declared, “If you ever return safely, the Lord has not spoken through me.” Then he added, “Mark my words, all you people!”

And I'll not read the rest of the story, but I'll summarize it:

Ahab goes into battle – he disguises himself in order to not be detected (you see, he knows!)

Verse 34 says,

³⁴ But someone drew his bow at random and hit the king of Israel between the sections of his armor . . . (What's the chance of that? No matter how hard we try to escape the word of the Lord, we can't escape the justice of God. And so he goes into battle, and God's got an arrow with his name on it!)



The blood from his wound ran onto the floor of the chariot, and that evening he died. ³⁶ As the sun was setting, a cry spread through the army: "Every man to his town. Every man to his land!"

³⁷ So the king died and was brought to Samaria, and they buried him there. ³⁸ They washed the chariot at a pool in Samaria (where the prostitutes bathed), and the dogs licked up his blood, as the word of the Lord had declared.

The book, The Insanity of God – tells the plight of persecuted Christians around the world.

And in one instance, the author tells of visiting persecuted Christians around the world - Somalia, China, Russia, the Middle East.

In one particular story, he tells about a Christian man named Dmitri, who learned the Gospel and began leading

his wife and children in Bible study and worship – and because houses were so close together and windows open in that small village, neighbors began to notice what was going in with Dmitri's family and some asked if they could come and listen to the Bible stories and sing the songs.

So eventually a small group of people began gathering to share in reading and discussing the Bible and singing praise.

So I'm reading here:

"By the time the little group grew to 25 people, the authorities had noticed. Local party officials came to see Dmitri. They threatened him physically and told him to cease the church meeting.

(Though Dmitri didn't think of it as a church, because he really didn't feel qualified to serve as a pastor, he was determined that the hand of God was on what they were doing).

SO – the communist official told Dmitri, "We don't care what you call it, but this looks like a church to us, and if you don't stop it, bad things are going to happen!"

When the group grew to 50 people, the authorities made good on their threats.

"I got fired from my factory job," Dmitri recounted. "My wife lost her teaching position. My boys were expelled from school." (Dmitri just kept being faithful to his calling).

When the number of people grew to 75, there was no place for everyone to sit. Villagers stood shoulder-to-shoulder, cheek-to-cheek inside the house. They pressed close-in the windows on the outside so they could listen as this man of God led the people of God in worship.

Then one night as Dmitri spoke, the door to his house suddenly, violently burst open. An officer and soldiers pushed through the crowd.

The officer grabbed Dmitri by the shirt, slapped him rhythmically back and forth across the face, slammed him against the wall, and said in a cold voice, “We warned you, and warned you, and warned you. I will not warn you again! If you do not stop this nonsense, this is the least that is going to happen to you.”

As the officer pushed his way back toward the door, a small grandmother took her life in her hands, stepped out of the anonymity of that worshipping community, and waved a finger in the officer’s face. Sounding like an OT Micaiah, she declared, “You have laid hands in a man of God and you will not survive.”

(Do you think she understand the call to obey God rather than man! Do you think following Jesus meant more than life to these people?)

He continues: “That happened on Tuesday evening – and on Thursday night the officer dropped dead of a heart attack. And as a result, the fear of God swept through the community.

At the next house-church service, more than 150 people showed up. The authorities couldn’t let this continue, so Dmitri was sent to jail for 17 years. (17 years!)

Ultimately, the story would have an ending where the work of God would be displayed in remarkable ways.

But it didn’t mean that the story was going to be easy to hear. It was painful. Dmitri spoke of long, heart-wrenching separation. He spoke of sweat, blood and tears.

He talked about sons growing up without their father in the house.

He described his poor, struggling family enduring great hardship.

But in the end, it was the story of one man who refused to let go of Jesus and refused to stop telling the Good News to his family and neighbors – that brought about salvation to multitudes.

As we wrap up, I just want to give you a couple of things to take home:

1. If you are leader, be aware of leadership blind spots – which means ignoring uncomfortable truths. Never let flattery be a substitute for honesty. (If 400 all say the same thing and there’s not at least one dissenting voice, it ought to tell you something).
2. Always be a truth teller, even when it’s hard. I saw this the other day:

“Great leaders don’t sugar coat reality.” (Great leaders aren’t jerks, but they’re honest).

And another:

“It is unlikely that you will be able to inspire, arouse, excite, or motivate people unless you can show who you are, what you stand for, and what you can and cannot do” (Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones, “Why Should Anyone Be Led By You?”)

3. Any significant personal growth in any of our lives requires a willingness on our part to hear what is wrong with us.

(Listen – we all know people like this – who believe they’re right, that believe they know everything - they know what everybody else ought to do – you can’t tell them anything because they already know. And anytime you bring up something negative about the choices they make, they immediately give you push back. (And what I’m asking is – could that be you? Because sometimes it’s me).
Solomon said, “People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them, they will receive mercy” (Proverbs 28:13).

If you hide your character flaws, if there is an unwillingness to take an honest assessment of who you are, where you are going in life – if you are unwilling, you are not going to move forward in a positive way or be blessed.

“Listen to advice and accept **discipline**, and at the end you will be counted among the wise” (Proverbs 19:20).

So how does wisdom come, especially when there are competing voices?

1. Let Scripture direct you. Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path (Psalm 119:105).

(The Word of God is our authority – our objective standard). And Ahab learned that the hard way – a random arrow pierced his heart). Let God’s Word be your primary guide.

2. Let conviction guide you. “The holy Spirit will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). The word and the Spirit are the right combination for good guidance. Reading the word for God’s principles, and prayer in the Spirit for guidance in the particulars of each situation.
3. Let godly people counsel you. Proverbs 27:17 – “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”

Proverbs 11:14 – “In the multitude of counselors, there is safety” (NKJV).

4. Doing the right things sometimes means standing alone. (We see this all through scripture. Elijah stood alone. Daniel stood alone. Noah stood alone! Sometimes family members have to stand alone. (Listen, you may be the only one in your family who stands for what is right!

Understand that even though it's hard – sometimes years of trial – keep standing, keep praying – God will reward your faithfulness). Trust him.

“The courage to change the world must start with the courage to stand alone.” John F. Kennedy

The lastly, always remember:

5. Believing a lie will not change the truth.

So I'll close with this:

In 1983, there was a collapse of a section of Interstate 95 in Connecticut. A 100ft section of the bridge fell into the river 70ft. below on a dark, foggy night. The first few cars that came upon it went right over the edge into the river below.

Then a very uneasy perceptive driver came along.

Straining to see what was in front of him in the thick fog, he noticed that the lights of the cars in front of him just disappeared. So he slowed down.

And when he came upon the missing section, he was able to stop.

Concerned about the drivers behind him, he turned his car around to shine his headlights into oncoming traffic and got out to wave cars down before they went over the edge.

The first car that came along did not even slow down, but as it went by the driver rolled down his window and cursed at the man in the street, just before plunging over the edge into the river.

You can refuse it, abuse it, or plow right through it, but it won't change the truth.

So where is God trying to get your attention today?

He loves you. He wants your attention. Today you have the opportunity.

My prayer is this week – we're listening.