

**THE LITTLE PEOPLE OF THE BIBLE: MICAIAH, A LITTLE PROPHET WHO SPOKE TRUTH TO
POWER**

1 Kings 22:1-28

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IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

I've been preaching on some of the little people in the Bible, people you don't hear about much. They played no starring role like Elijah, Moses, or Mary the Mother of Jesus. I'm preaching about the little people of the Bible because I believe God is partial to them. We hear the names of the big shot CEOs of Enron and WorldCom who became millionaires but we rarely hear the names of the thousands of Enron and WorldCom employees whose pension have gone down the drain. The God who comes to us in Jesus Christ is the advocate of little people.

Today I'm focusing on a little known prophet named Micaiah who spoke the truth to power. Listen to a retelling of his story. Ahab and Jehoshaphat lived about a hundred years after the death of King Solomon and about 850 years before the birth of Christ. After Solomon's death the kingdom of Israel was divided north and south by a civil war just like our own nation was divided during Lincoln's presidency. Israel's Civil War, unlike ours, ended in a permanent division between the northern kingdom of Israel with it's capital in Samaria and the Southern kingdom of Judah with it's capital in Jerusalem. Jehoshaphat was one of Judah's best kings and Ahab, one of Israel's worst. Good King Jehoshaphat came from Jerusalem to visit bad King Ahab in Samaria. That's like President Lincoln traveling from Washington D.C. to Richmond, Virginia to consult with Jefferson Davis about a Confederate territorial dispute with Mexico.

Ahab says to Jehoshaphat, "We need your military help to liberate Ramoth from Syria."

Jehoshaphat agrees but he's concerned about the chances of success so he says, "Inquire first for the word of the Lord."

So King Ahab brings in 400 prophets all of whom are on the federal payroll. So all the prophets paid for by King Ahab preach what the King wanted to hear, "Go down and fight Syria."

Jehoshaphat is a little suspicious of 400 preachers preaching the same sermon. It sounds a little like plagiarism with Ahab writing the sermon. So Jehoshaphat asks, "Don't you have any other prophets?"

Ahab says, "Well, yes. There's Micaiah but I can't stand his sermons. He never preaches anything favorable to me. He's so negative."

"Well, I'd like to hear Micaiah", Jehoshaphat said. Micaiah was probably imprisoned at the time so Ahab sent a soldier to bring him into the presence of the two kings. The soldier warned him, "Now listen, Micaiah, this is what the other prophets are saying. If you value your life you'd better agree with them."

At first Micaiah mockingly parrots the advice of the 400 prophets. But Ahab sees through the ploy and commands, "Tell the truth!" So Micaiah solemnly speaks the truth to powerful kings. "I see all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep that have no shepherd." Ahab understands that *he's* the shepherd and if he goes off to war with the Syrians, his soldiers will return home *without him* so the king was livid. Angrily he complains to Jehoshaphat, "Did I not tell you that he wouldn't prophesy good concerning me, but evil?" Ahab turned to his royal guard and commanded, "Put this guy back in prison and feed him bread and water."

Now before I draw any lessons from this story let me say three things about biblical prophets. When we hear the word *prophet* we may think of people like Nostradamus who supposedly made all kinds of predictions hundreds of years ago. In the popular mind we place prophets in the company of future tellers, Tarot card readers, weather forecasters and financial

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advisors. But Biblical prophets are in a different category. They simply spoke the Word of the Lord in much the same way a minister preaches the Word in a sermon or homily. A prophet is something like a combination of a news editorialist, a presidential advisor and a preacher.

Think of Micaiah, first, as an editorialist. An editorialist sometimes warns us of the disastrous consequences of governmental policies. Read the editorial page of the Sunday news. Some editorialists will urge us to go to war with Iraq. Others will urge us to avoid war. I like to read the editorial page. I particularly like to read a minority point of view. Some editorials simply parrot public opinion. But then there are editorialists like Micaiah. Often, in the history of our nation a brave editorialist has written an unpopular column criticizing the government. They're branded unpatriotic and end up on the White House hit list. But a later generation says, "That editorialist was really prophetic."

Secondly, think of Micaiah, as a presidential advisor. Political leaders sometimes use religious people as advisors. They get popular preachers to bless their plans. Edward Gibbon, the great historian of the decline of the Roman Empire once said, "All religions are considered *equally true* by the common person, *equally false* by the philosophers and *equally useful* by the politicians." Too often political leaders use religious leaders for their purposes. The church has always been far too often eager to bless plans for war and too timid in urging peace with justice. *But Micaiah...*

Thirdly, think of Micaiah, as a visionary preacher. Micaiah envisioned the Lord sitting on a throne in heaven surrounded by a heavenly retinue that included lying spirits. We modern people have a hard time understanding how God could send lying spirits to deceive government leaders. But I think of Micaiah's vision as a creative method of bringing the truth home to Ahab. If the Lord sent lying spirits to deceive Ahab, he also sent a visionary preacher to reveal the dangers of listening only to what he wanted to hear. God didn't want Ahab killed. He wanted

him to be saved. But sometimes we adamantly refuse the good things God wants for us and make bad choices which bring immediate gratification. God sometimes allows us to have what we want most, rather than the good things God wants for us. Sometimes, like a loving parent God says what the good father said to his prodigal son, "Go ahead and do what you're determined to do – but I tell you, you're heading for disaster."

Now I want to draw three lessons before I conclude.

First, sometimes it only takes one brave person to speak up to change the course of history. ^{Rosa Parks,} All your friends may be telling you to do one thing – the thing you really want to do but which isn't what's best for you. Don't be afraid to listen to the lone voice of a friend who warns you about the disastrous consequences of bad choices.

Secondly, "When people prefer a sermon which makes them *feel good* rather than one which encourages them *to be good*, it's easy for the preacher to say what the congregation wants to hear rather than what we need to hear to make us better than we are. *I did not like what*

Thirdly, when the church receives privileges from the government, as did Ahab's 400 palace chaplains, it becomes increasingly difficult to address the nation and government prophetically. *Religious schools ... faith based social programs ... Beware - The Church has good intentions but can cause faith based institutions to water down their message.*

Finally, most of the people in this congregation will never become CEO's, presidents, generals, chief justices, or famous movie stars but you helped to save Andrew's life. I want to thank Fil and Gene who went looking for Andrew when the ambulance had not arrived. I thank his and our friends who visited, sent cards, prepared meals, telephoned, and, most importantly, prayed. We little people need to stick together, worship together, serve God together and celebrate together as we work and wait for God's coming kingdom.

Let us pray: Merciful God, you sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation. Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.