

God's word is final! - 1 Kings 22v1-38

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Date: 19 May 2019

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[0 : 00] Father, we thank you for the word of your truth. Thank you that it is powerful and effective. And we pray that we would not sit in judgment over it, but we would sit in submission under it. And we would ask, Father, that you would take your word and drive it deep into our hearts and lives so that we may become who you call us to be. Teach us this morning, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, Ahab's persistent rebellion... Oh, good man, Sam. We're going to stop. We're going to press pause again. These things I forget. If you'd like a sheet, sorry about that. So take notes and a pen.

[1 : 09] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Ahab's persistent rebellion has been matched by God's persistent grace. For six chapters we've been following his life from chapter 17 all the way up to chapter 22. And God has continuously and persistently been calling Ahab back to himself by his word through the prophets. Ahab, come back to me. But the more he hears God's word, the more defiant he becomes. His life is summarized for us at the very end of chapter 21 verse 25.

[3 : 04] There was never anyone like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife.

He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols. So setting up his own gods. Like the Amorites, the Lord drove out before Israel.

So now as we enter into chapter 22, it records for us the tragic end of Ahab's life. Now as we follow along these last few days of his life, we need to be careful that Ahab's story doesn't become our story.

In fact, the New Testament tells us how we should read accounts like Ahab. You can see it there on the screen. It's talking about the account in the Old Testament.

And it says, These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us. So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall.

[4 : 27] So the account of Ahab, this whole account of One Kings and this life of Ahab has been written down for us. And it becomes a gracious warning to us.

Be careful that you don't fall. Well, what do we need to be careful of? Well, first, our stubborn refusal to hear God's voice.

Ahab seems to be trigger happy. He's itching again for a fight. Let's read from verse 1. For three years there was no war between Aram and Israel.

But in the third year, Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, went down to the sea, the king of Israel. So Judah was in the north, Israel in the south.

And the 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.

[5 : 36] Now, Ramoth Gilead was a very important, it was a very strategic town. It kind of sat right on the border of Israel and their enemies, Aram.

So it was an important place to own or to have rule over. Verse 4. So he asked Jehoshaphat, Will you go with me to fight against Ramoth Gilead?

Jehoshaphat replied to the king of Israel, I am as you are. My people is your people, my horses is your horses. Of course, I'll support you in a fight.

I'm with you. But Jehoshaphat also said to the king of Israel, First seek the counsel of the Lord.

So it seems that at least between the two of them, there is one of them who has a little bit of sense. We need to hear what God has to say about this.

[6 : 35] First seek the counsel of the Lord. Well, what's Ahab going to do? Well, Ahab stubbornly rejects the word.

Verse 6. 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?

Go, they answered, for the Lord will give it in to the king's hands. Well, it appears, doesn't it, on the face of it, that he's taken good advice.

He's called in the prophets. Not just one of them, but 400 of them. Advisors who's going to tell him what to do. But they're not who they appear to be.

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

[7 : 37] Prophets they may be, but they are not the Lord's prophets. You see, Ahab doesn't want to hear God's word.

And the reason why, look at the end of verse 8, because the prophets, and in particular Micaiah, well, he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad.

He is Micaiah, son of Imlah. I don't want to listen to him. Now, don't we treat God's words in the same way?

We won't listen to it. We won't read God's word. We push it away because, well, I don't like what God's word has to say.

It tells me terrible things about myself. That I'm a sinner and that when I try to be good, I can't be good. And so we search out other words.

[8 : 40] We go from one church to another church, from one teaching to another teaching. We turn on the television to the God channel, or we look up preachers on the internet who promise things like health and wealth and tell us, you're wonderful.

Never settling until we hear what we want to hear. Never content until the preacher says, what suits my desires.

The New Testament says exactly the same thing. Listen to Paul's instruction to Timothy, a young pastor.

He says, the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather round them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. Have you got itchy ears?

[9 : 51] Ahab did. Never satisfied until he heard what he wanted to hear. Be careful that none of us don't develop an itchy ear syndrome where we close our ears to the word of God's truth.

Second, Ahab stubbornly sits in judgment over the word. Ahab, it seems, goes along with Jehoshaphat and he goes, right, okay, I've got these 400 prophets, but I'll listen to this one prophet of God.

But look at the way Ahab does it in verse 10. Dressed in their royal robes, the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, were sitting on their thrones.

There they are with their crown and their fine robes and all their regalia at the threshing floor by the entrance of the gate of Samaria with all the prophets prophesying before them.

It's kind of like the meeting place, the gathering place to hear what has to be said. He's acting like a high court judge. Bring in the prophets.

[11 : 05] Let's hear what they have to say. First up, verse 11, Now Zedekiah, son of Kenanah, had made iron horns and he declared, This is what the Lord says.

With these you will gore the Arameans until they are destroyed. Oh, I like Zedekiah. He's a good prophet. I'll keep him. And one by one they all have their say.

Verse 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 hands.

Now it's Micaiah's turn. God's prophet. He's under serious pressure. If he wants to keep on the king's good side, well, all he has to do, look at the end of verse 13, Let your word agree with theirs and speak favourably.

Just say what everybody else is saying and you'll be okay. Verse 14, But Micaiah said, As surely as the Lord lives, I can only tell him what the Lord tells me.

[12 : 19] We can see it coming, can't we? Micaiah isn't going to win prophet of the year award, is he? But it's not just Ahab who sits in judgment over God's word.

We sit on our own self-made thrones, assuming a position of authority over God's word. Do we ever decide what parts of the Bible I think are right?

It's no longer what God actually says, but what I desire, what I think is right. And so we ignore difficult things about marriage and sexuality.

Things about forgiving your enemy and repenting and dealing with things like greed and gossiping. So we sit in judgment over God's word and we decide what parts we obey and things we don't want to obey. Well, I need to hear the word of God through another prophet, the prophet Isaiah.

[13:30] This is what he says. God's speaking through him. And these are the ones I look on with favour. Those who are humble and contrite in spirit and who tremble at my word.

We never ever sit over the word. We are always to be sitting under the word. Let it challenge us. Let it shape us.

Let it show us who we are. So first, be careful of the warning or the refusal to hear God's voice. Second, be careful of the tragic deception by rejecting God's truth. You see, Ahab is still concerned about the war situation.

Verse 15. So when Micaiah arrived, the king asked him, Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead or not?

[14:40] Attack and be victorious, he answered, for the Lord's going to give it into the king's hands. 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?

Will you stop messing with my head, Micaiah? You only tell me bad things. Why are you telling me this good thing? Just tell me the truth. Okay, you want the real truth?

Well, here it is. Verse 17. 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. Look, Ahab, if you go up and fight, you will not only lose, you are going to die.

The people are going to be left without a shepherd, a leader, a king. But what's the truth to a man who's already decided what he wants the truth to be?

[15:52] The reality is, Ahab is convinced in his own heart what he should do. He doesn't want to know the truth. You see, Micaiah explains to Ahab what is actually going on in his own heart.

Micaiah has had a vision. God has given him a vision of what's actually going on in Ahab's life. Let's pick it up in verse 19. Micaiah continued.

He's speaking to Ahab. Therefore, hear the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting on his throne. Now, isn't that significant? Just a moment ago, Ahab was sitting on his throne in all his judgment. Now, the focus changes. I saw the Lord sitting on his throne. with all the multitudes of heaven standing around him on his right and on the left.

So all the who's who, those who think they have power and authority, all of them gathered around God's throne. And the Lord said, who will entice Ahab into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there?

[17:11] You see, God has already decreed that Ahab is going to die. Because he's rejected the truth, because of his persistent disobedience, he will die.

It's just a case of when and how that's going to happen. Verse 21, Finally, a spirit came forward, that's an evil spirit, and stood before the Lord and said, I will entice him.

By what means, the Lord asked. Well, I will go out and I will 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. God gives the lying spirit permission to go out and deceive Ahab.

So, Ahab, you want to know what's going on in your own heart? You really want to know what's going on behind the scenes? Well, here it is. Let me tell you, verse 23. So now the Lord has put a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours.

[18:22] The Lord has decreed disaster for you. You see, the word that Ahab has been chosen to listen to is a word of deception.

rejection. In fact, the voices that Ahab has been listening to is in reality a voice of God's judgment. He's become so deceived by his own rebellion that he can no longer discern what the truth is.

Now, I don't know about you, but that frightens me. That in my rejection of God's truth, I'm actually only deceiving myself.

In fact, I can become so deceived that I can no longer discern what the truth actually is. And that scares me.

But he doesn't just have a deceived heart. He has a defiant response. Tragically, Ahab plays out what God has exposed in his own heart.

[19 : 37] The word of truth has absolutely no effect. You see, we'll sit here and we'll go, well, that's not fair. God deceived him. God told him lies.

Well, God also made it absolutely crystal clear what was going to happen. Do you see at the end of verse 23? The Lord has decreed disaster for you. So whether it's a deceiving spirit or the truth, it's loud and clear, it's plain and simple, you go to war, you're going to die.

Well, what's his response? Verse 26, the king of Israel then ordered, take Micaiah and send him back to Ammon, the ruler of the city and to Joash, the king's son, 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.

How defiant is that? It's just been spelled out to him so clearly, you go and fight, you're going to die. The Lord has decreed disaster for you, but in his defiance, his only response is, put Micaiah in prison, I'm going to come home safely.

Even if he wanted to listen to the truth, he can't. The truth no longer means anything to him. You see, this does scare me, because continued and persistent disobedience leads to defiance.

[21 : 21] If we keep ignoring the truth time and time again, then the time will come when we will no longer be able to discern the truth.

We can no longer recognize the sin in our life that needs repented of. We have become so deceived by the very voices that we have chosen to hear, that we can no longer see what's right and what's wrong.

So, be careful of the refusal to hear God's voice. Be careful of the deception by rejecting God's truth.

And let's be warned about the faithful consequences of defying God's word. You see, Ahab may be a man of authority, he may be a king, he may lock Micaiah up in the prison, he may have silenced God's prophet, shut him away, but God's word will not and cannot be silenced.

What God has spoken will come to pass. First, there's going to be no hiding from God's word.

[22 : 47] Let's follow the account. It's, again, brilliant writing, wonderful narrative, a great story. Let's pick it up in verse 29.

So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, went up to Ram of Gilead. They're going to go fight. The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, I will enter the battle in disguise, but you wear your royal robes.

So the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle. Now from a military point of view, it makes perfect sense. What a wonderful plan. Dress up, pretend to be somebody different.

If the enemy doesn't know who you are, then there's a high chance you're going to survive.

Because the whole idea in battles then was you aim for the king. If you got the king, you got the whole army.

So there's Jehoshaphat, the dumb nut, dressed up as the king, and the true king in disguise. What's going to happen?

[23 : 53] Well, verse 31. Now the king of Aram had ordered his 32 chariot commanders, do not fight with anyone, small or great, except the king of Israel.

When the chariot commanders saw Jehoshaphat, they thought, surely this is the king of Israel. So they turned to attack him. But when they heard Jehoshaphat cry out, please, not me, not me, it's not me, I'm not Aram, I'm not Ahab, not me, don't kill me.

Verse 33, the chariot commander saw that he was not the king of Israel and stopped pursuing him. Ahab's plan is working, it's wonderful. We can see him there flying around in his chariot.

Micaiah, who does he think he is telling me I'm not going to die in battle? Verse 34, but someone, we don't know his name, drew his bow at random, and hit the king of Israel between the sections of his armour.

Now, if this was a movie, the camera would be focused right on that soldier's face. Picture the scene, the bow tight up against his face, and as he releases the arrow, the camera follows it through the battle, all the people fighting, and it's just going straight, straight, straight, straight, straight, and the arrow pierces Ahab, and then the camera locks on Ahab's face, and his smile, that grinning, defying smile, turns to agony, and disbelief.

[25 : 42] verse 34, the king told his chariot driver, wheel round and get me out of the fighting, I've been wounded.

All day long the battle raged and the king was propped up in his chariot facing the Arameans. The blood from his wound ran onto the floor of the chariot, and that evening he died.

You see, there is no hiding from God's word. What God has decreed will come to pass, and nothing and no one can stop it.

Now we need to be very careful that we don't play the role of Ahab, because we too can put on our disguise of, well, we can use clever arguments, undermining God's word.

We look at it and read and go, it's just made up. It's just an elaborate fairy tale. Don't need to believe what God has to say. We can even put on a disguise of ignorance.

[26 : 56] I didn't think it was serious. I didn't realise that we had to take it literally, that what God says really does happen. I didn't understand that. Well, whatever our reason, whatever disguise we put on to push God's word away, God's word will find a way through like an arrow.

It will pierce our hearts. We cannot hide from the truth. No hiding from God's word.

word of judgment falls. You see, let's not forget what's going on here. This is a story that started in chapter 17.

All the way, Ahab has persisted in disobedience and defiance. And God has matched that, persistently, speaking so clearly, warning him so graciously, providing prophet after prophet, Ahab, come back to me, Ahab.

But when grace is refused, judgment will come. Verse 37. So the king died and was brought to Samaria, and they buried him there.

[28 : 23] 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.

In chapter 21, we didn't get an opportunity to look at this. It gives us a whole long account of how Ahab had agreed to murder a vineyard owner named Naboth.

he liked his vineyard and he decided, I'll take it, I'll have it. And so they had him killed so that Ahab could have the vineyard. And in response, this is what God said, chapter 21, verse 19.

the prophet said 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. And so, chapter 22, end of verse 38, the dogs licked up his blood as the word of the Lord had declared.

[29 : 40] Defy the word of God. Reject his grace. Persist in defying him. And judgment will come.

Now, you can say, well, you know what, Johnny, it's a great story. Yes, it would make a great film, but it's all a bit much, isn't it, really? Isn't this all a little bit far fetched?

I mean, you don't really expect us today, in 2019, to believe this kind of stuff anymore. This is ancient stuff. It's just a story.

No need to take it seriously. Well, be careful that you don't begin to deceive yourself, because it's beginning to sound a little bit like, just like Ahab.

Be careful that you do not fall. fall. You see, God's word is final.

[30 : 52] What God decrees will be done. In other words, we are to trust what God says. Defying God's word will ultimately destroy us, yet trusting his word is what is going to save us.

God's final word through his final and ultimate prophet, Jesus Christ.

Have a look at John chapter 5 with me. John chapter 5, the gospel according to John in the New Testament. Here we hear the words through God's final and ultimate prophet, Jesus Christ.

And how we respond to this word determines our destiny. John chapter 5, verse 24.

Very truly, take note of this. This is important. This is serious. Jesus says, I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but is crossed over from death to life.

[32 : 27] my word says Jesus is a saving word. I have saved you. I have died for you. I will forgive you.

I will no longer condemn you. I will bring you peace. I will bless you. I will save you. Hear my word.

Believe my word. Believe what I say. verse 25. Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice or hear the word of the Son of God and those who hear will live.

What word are we going to listen to? A word that will judge or a voice that we will one day hear that will say to those who have died in Christ, arise, get up, live, welcome into my eternal kingdom. Welcome to a kingdom where there is no more suffering or pain or death. It is God's final words. [33 : 51] Defy it, and it will destroy us. Trust his word and it will save us and give us life today and life for all eternity.

Be careful. Be warned from the life of Ahab so that we too do not fall. Let's pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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