

# God's fulfilled word

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[ 0 : 00 ]     So that's 1 Kings 22 verses 1 to 40.

For three years Syria and Israel continued without war. But in the third year, Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, came down to the king of Israel. And the king of Israel said to his servants, Do you know that Ramoth Gilead belongs to us, and we keep quiet and do not take it out of the hand of the king of Syria?

And he said to Jehoshaphat, Will you go with me to battle at Ramoth Gilead? And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses.

And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, Inquire first for the word of the Lord. And the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said to them, Shall I go to battle against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain?

And they said, Go up, for the Lord will give it into the hand of the king. But Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here another prophet, of whom the Lord, of whom we may inquire?

[ 1 : 23 ]     And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, by whom we may inquire, of the Lord, Micaiah the son of Imla, But I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me, but evil.

And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so. Then the king of Israel summoned an officer and said, Bring quickly Micaiah the son of Imla.

Now the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah were sitting on their thrones, arraying their robes at the threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria, and all the prophets were prophesying before them.

And Zedekiah the son of Chanana made himself horns of iron and said, Thus says the Lord, With these you shall push the Syrians until they are destroyed.

And all the prophets prophesied so, and said, Go up to Ramoth Gilead and triumph. The Lord will give it into the hand of the king. And the messenger went up to summon Micaiah, said to him, Behold, the word of the prophets, with one accord, are favourable to the king.

[ 2 : 38 ]     Let your word be like one of them, and speak favourably. But Micaiah said, As the Lord lives, what the Lord says to me, that I will speak.

And when he had come to the king, the king said to him, Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth Gilead to battle, or shall we refrain? And he answered him, Go up and triumph.

The Lord will give it into the hand of the king. But the king said to him, How many times shall I make you swear that you speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?

And he said, I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains as sheep that have no shepherd. And the Lord said, These have no master.

Let each return to his home in peace. And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell you that he would not prophesise good concerning me, but evil?

[ 3 : 43 ] And Micaiah said, Therefore hear the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the hosts of heaven standing beside him, on his right hand and on his left.

And the Lord said, Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth Gilead? And one said one thing, and another said another.

Then a spirit came forward, and stood before the Lord, saying, I will entice him. And the Lord said, By what mean? And he said, I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.

And he said, You are to entice him, and you shall succeed. Go out and do so. Now therefore, behold, the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets.

The Lord has declared disaster for you. Then Zedekiah, the son of Chanana, came near and struck Micaiah on the cheek, and said, How did the spirit of the Lord go from me to speak to you?

[ 4 : 53 ] And Micaiah said, Behold, you shall see on that day when you go into an inner chamber to hide yourself. And the king of Israel said, Seize Micaiah, and take him back to Ammon, the governor of the city, and Joash, the king's son, and say thus, says the king, Put this fellow in prison, and feed him meager rations of bread and water, until I come in peace.

And Micaiah said, If you return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me. And he said, Hear, all you people. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, went up to Ramoth Gilead.

And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, I will disguise myself and go into battle, but you wear your robes. And the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle.

Now the king of Syria had commanded the thirty-two captains of his chariot, fight neither small nor great, but only the king of Israel.

And when the captains saw the chariots, and when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, It is surely the king of Israel. So they turned to fight against him, and Jehoshaphat cried out.

[ 6 : 16 ] And when the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back from pursuing him. But a certain man drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel between the scale armour and the breastplate.

Therefore, he said to the driver of his chariot, Turn around and carry me out of the battle, for I am wounded. And the battle continued that day. And the king was propped up in his chariot, facing the Syrians, until at evening he died.

And the blood of the wound flowed into the chariot, into the bottom of the chariot. And about sunset a cry went through the army, Every man to his city and every man to his country.

So the king died and was brought to Samaria, and they buried the king in Samaria, and they washed the chariot by the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood, and the prostitutes washed themselves in it, according to the word of the Lord that he had spoken.

Now, the rest of the acts of Ahab and all that he did and the ivory house that he built and all the cities that he built, are they not written in the books of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

[ 7 : 36 ] So Ahab slept with his fathers, and Elisaziah, his son, reigned in his place. Good morning, everyone. Let me add my welcome to you.

Whether you're in Dulwich or somewhere else, we love having you here. My name is Michael, and I'm a member of the church family here. Now, we all love heroes, don't we?

Whether it's Superman in a film or Harry Kane on the football pitch. Well, in our passage today, our hero is a prophet called Micaiah. Now, he's a different kind of hero to the ones we're used to in popular culture or sports, and he may not be very well known to us.

But as I prepare for this talk, he's become a hero of mine, and I hope he will be yours too. Now, the application or the big application question in this story is why?

Why in the face of hostile opposition to the gospel, why do Christians persevere in proclaiming the gospel? Why do we keep on commending Jesus Christ to our friends despite seeing little fruit?

[ 8 : 45 ] Why not just give up altogether? After all, isn't it just too hard? Isn't it much easier to live just like everyone else? Well, let's dive in. Firstly, God's people listen to the word of the Lord.

God's people listen to the word of the Lord. Now, we start off with a scene with two kings, Ahab and Jehoshaphat. Now, Ahab is the king of the northern kingdom of Israel, and apart from one act of humility and repentance as we saw last week.

He's been the baddie in our short series in One Kings, and here he's back in his old ways. And during Jehoshaphat's diplomatic visit to Israel, Ahab sees an opportunity to ask him to form an alliance to war against Syria.

Ahab wants to take back the town of Ramoth Gilead. Now, on paper, it should be a walkover. Ahab defeated Syria twice before, and in the last battle, Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria, had to strike a deal with Ahab and beg for his life.

He left alive, but with his tail firmly between his legs. Now, three years on in Bible accounts, Ahab should still be the odd-on favorite to win a game.

[ 10 : 04 ] Now, Jehoshaphat, he's the other king. He's the king of the southern kingdom of Judah. Now, he's somewhat a godlier king than Ahab. And in verse 43, towards the end of the chapter, it says, he did what was right in the sight of the Lord.

And back towards the beginning in verse 5, he petitioned Ahab to inquire first for the word of the Lord. And then Ahab gathered the prophets together, about 400 men, and said to them, shall I go to battle against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain?

And then they said, go up, for the Lord will give it to the hand of the king. But something didn't feel quite right. So Jehoshaphat asked for a second opinion in verse 7.

Is there not here another prophet of the Lord whom we may inquire? And Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, there is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord, Amakiah, the son of Imla, but I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me, but evil.

And Jehoshaphat said, let not the king say so. Two kings, one who sought the word of the Lord, and one who paid lip service, one who sought truth, and one who hates truth.

[ 11 : 32 ] Like Jehoshaphat, God's people today are to listen to the word of the Lord. In many ways, we're much more privileged than Jehoshaphat ever was because we have the Bible.

And the Bible is the very word of the Lord. Every time we read this book, every time we pray in line with God's promises from the Bible, we are listening to the word of the Lord.

Ahab, on the other hand, he's a perfect specimen of one who is given the word of the Lord, but just wouldn't accept it. He sees God's word as evil, rather than the gracious warning that it is.

It's the truth, but he prefers not to believe it. In contrast, God's people listen to the word of the Lord. Secondly, God's people proclaim the word of the Lord.

God's people proclaim the word of the Lord. Now, the key statement by our hero surely must be verse 14. As the Lord lives, what the Lord says to me, that I will speak.

[ 12 : 42 ] Because, as we see, Micaiah's ministry is characterized by his unwavering conviction in the certainty of God's word. But before the spotlight turns to Micaiah, it's hard to miss the pomp and the pageantry of the whole scene with the two kings.

Look with me at verse 10. Now, Ahab and Jehoshaphat were sitting on their thrones, arrayed in their robes at the threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria.

And all the prophets were prophesying before them. And Zedekiah made himself horns of iron and said, Thus says the Lord, With these you shall push the Syrians until they are destroyed.

And all the prophets prophesied so and said, Go up to Ramoth-Gilead and triumph. The Lord will give it into the hand of the king. Everything is deliberately grand and impressive.

The two kings sitting on their respective thrones are both dressed royally for the occasion. They're at the gate, which in that culture is the decision-making nerve center of the country.

[ 13 : 49 ] And accompanying them was an impressive array, an impressive number of 400 prophets and no doubt many more others. Cast of thousands, you might say.

And the prophecy seems unanimous. It's a sure win. In contrast, Micaiah's faithful ministry seems lowly and unimpressive.

He's a lonely figure, mostly ignored. But although Micaiah's ministry seems unimpressive from the outside, his ministry is the only one that offers truth to the king, proclaiming the word of the Lord.

And so it is with Christians today as we try to share the good news of Jesus to our friends. Now, our friends may live sorted, impressive lives. They might be just as uninterested in the gospel as they are interested in their careers, their children's education, or their perfect Instagram lifestyle.

In the face of such apathy or resistance, how do we keep on commending the gospel to them? And so I think we can learn from Micaiah as we navigate the challenges in our own ministries, in our own witness.

[ 15 : 07 ] Now, firstly, we can learn that God's people proclaim the word of the Lord despite being largely ignored. Micaiah's message is what Ahab needs to hear, but not what Ahab wants to hear.

Now, truth can be hard to swallow. It isn't always popular. Ahab hates it and so excludes Micaiah. Other prophets enjoy the pomp and the pageantry and the honor of prophesying before the king.

Not Micaiah. Like Elijah in chapters 18 and 19, Micaiah faced the same loneliness and friendlessness for being faithful to God.

Now, those of us who've been a Christian long enough, I'm sure can relate to what some of that loneliness feels like because of our faith. Being shut out from certain social occasions or being blanked or ridiculed at school or being ignored for promotion in the workplace or being cast out by our own family.

In a culture where false prophecy is a norm, Micaiah is brushed aside. Zedekiah, who looked like the leader of the 400 prophets, even fashioned a visual aid of iron horns to demonstrate how Ahab would gorge his enemy into destruction.

[ 16 : 26 ] And Micaiah's message didn't come with fancy props or platitudinous words. He was armed only with the word of the Lord and he was prepared to be ignored for its truth.

Secondly, God's people proclaimed the word of the Lord despite of the rest of relentless pressure to conform. Notice how Micaiah faced enormous pressure to conform at every turn.

Firstly, being ignored as we've just seen. I'm sure he would have been invited to the party if he caved and just preached the same nonsense as his other colleagues. And then, there's that passive threat from Ahab's PR manager as he's summoned in verse 13.

Behold, the words of the prophets with one accord are favourable to the king. Let your word be like the word of one of them and speak favourably. Can you sense the subtle threat?

Well, for us, perhaps it's pressure from our superiors to toe the party line. Look, Michael, I know you're a Christian and don't tell lies, but COVID is really killing our business.

[ 17 : 41 ] So, although we haven't got conclusive data, we have to really sell this product as the finished product. We need everyone to be team players here.

Can I count on you? Or perhaps it's friendship that's at stake. I'd love for you to come to my daughter's birthday party as your daughter is her best friend.

But only if you can promise not to bring up Jesus. We really do find that judgmental and we don't need that to ruin the mood of the party. Would our response follow our heroes?

As the Lord lives, what the Lord says to me, that I will speak. Now, in the verse that follows, some commentators suggest Mike High had a bit of a wobble as he initially appears to say exactly the same thing as the other prophets.

Go up in triumph. The Lord will give it to the hand of the king. But I think it's much more likely that these two have history as they didn't see eye to eye.

[ 18 : 46 ] And this is no more than Micaiah just simply trying to wind up Ahab. But it also cleverly underlines Ahab's irony of wanting the truth but not prepared to receive it when it doesn't go his way.

So he demands of Micaiah again in verse 16, how many times shall I make you swear that you speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord? And again, the truth is not the news Ahab wants to hear.

Which brings me to my next point. God's people proclaim the word of the Lord despite of bringing bad news. Now Micaiah says in verse 17, I saw all Israel scattered on the mountain as sheep that have no shepherd.

And the Lord said, these have no master. Let each return to his home in peace. And also in verse 23, Behold, the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets.

The Lord has declared disaster for you. That's bad news all around. Micaiah isn't just offending Ahab. He's calling all the other prophets brown-nosing liars.

[ 19 : 59 ] Warnings are the main means in which Old Testament prophets proclaim the word of the Lord. And to some like Ahab, it seems like bad news because it's not the news he wants to hear.

But it is the news that he needs to hear because these messages are designed for the hearer to repent and turn back to the Lord. It's the warning triangle before the cliff edge.

Stop. Don't go this way. Turn back. The Lord Jesus didn't just preach the good news. He preached the bad too. John 3.16 is a famous verse that many of us know well.

But the verses follow immediately is a warning triangle for people to turn from their own ways and to Jesus. verse 16 says, For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

And then in verse 17 and 18, For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only son of God.

[ 21 : 18 ] And wonderfully, the gospel doesn't just leave us hanging with only the bad news. It's a loving warning sign urging us away from the cliff towards the right path.

And like Ahab, our friends need to know that we are all sinners in need of a savior. Without Jesus Christ, our friends are set for destruction.

And they need brave Micaiahs to tell them the news they need to hear, not the news they want to hear. Now, in a way, we've touched on the cost of being ignored, being unpopular, being excluded, but there might be even heavier costs.

Now, Micaiah's words of warning didn't go down well as Zedekiah punched him in the face and Ahab locked him up in prison. And with Ahab dying in battle and not returning, Micaiah's sentence could well have been a life sentence.

At verse 27, thus says the king, put this fellow in prison and feed him meager rations of bread and water until I come in peace. And Micaiah said, if you return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me.

[ 22 : 31 ] So God's people proclaim the word of the Lord despite heavy cost. In Dulwich, we may not necessarily suffer physical hardship for sticking up to our Christian faith, but Christians in many parts of the world are being persecuted for exactly that.

Here are just a few of the headlines in the past two weeks alone. 28th of October, North Korean Christians brutally tortured for their faith. 29th of October, multiple Christians wounded in Fulani militant attacks across Nigeria.

5th of November, Chinese Christians summoned for speaking on Christianity and the Chinese culture. 5th of November again, Boko Haram kills 12 Christians, kidnaps others.

And sadly, the list goes on. And for Micaiah, why was he willing to bear the heavy cost of an unpopular and seemingly fruitless ministry? Well, it's because he trusts in the word of the Lord.

And he trusts it because he knows what the Lord says would happen will happen. He knows the word of the Lord is certain. The word of the Lord is certain.

[ 23 : 46 ] And as the story moves towards its final act, we see Ahab trying to outwit Micaiah's prophecy, but ends up getting killed anyway. And the lesson here is not so much bad things happen to those who don't believe in God's word, because in the Bible, bad things happen to both the faithful and the unfaithful.

But I think the section is here so that we can learn of the beating heart of Micaiah's fruitful ministry, and why he perseveres in proclaiming the word of the Lord, despite the costs.

So we see both Ahab and Jehoshaphat prepared to go into battle together, but cunning Ahab thought, well, just in case Micaiah was right, he'll disguise himself so he won't be recognized by the Syrians.

And perhaps in the lapse of judgment, Jehoshaphat agrees to put on Ahab's battle costume. It's a mistake that almost gets him killed. In the meantime, the Syrians came up with a clever strategy.

Only a focused attack on the king would bring them victory. Their elite chariots were instructed to fight Ahab only and not to get drawn into any other skirmishes.

[ 25 : 00 ] And so when they spotted who they thought was Ahab, what was actually Jehoshaphat, they made a beeline for him. But just as they were about to strike, Jehoshaphat cried out.

And once the chariots realized he wasn't actually Ahab, they pivoted away. But as we pick up from verse 34, about halfway down that long paragraph, but a certain man drew his bow at random and struck Ahab between the scale armor and the breastplate.

Therefore Ahab said to the driver of his chariot, turn around and carry me out of battle, for I am wounded. And the battle continued that day, and Ahab was propped up in his chariot facing the Syrians.

Until that evening, he died. And the blood of the wound flowed into the bottom of the chariot, and about sunset, a cry went through the army, every man to his city, and every man to his country.

So Ahab died and was brought to Samaria, and they buried him in Samaria. And they washed the chariot by the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood, and the prostitutes washed themselves in it, according to the word of the Lord that he had spoken.

[ 26 : 18 ] Ahab's demise is a fulfillment of at least two prophecies. one from 1 Kings 20 after Ahab spared Ben-Hadad and when he should have destroyed him, and one by Micaiah himself in verse 28 of this chapter.

Both point to Ahab's demise here. Now Ahab tried to escape his fate by going incognito, but you can't fool God. God is sovereign over everything, even over a random fluke shot.

his word cannot be thwarted. And we won't have time to go into all the fulfillments of prophecy, but just briefly, in verse 36, the scattering of Ahab's men, it's a fulfillment of verse 17, where the Lord saw Israel's men like scattered sheep with no shepherd, and each returning to his home in peace.

In verse 38, the strange scene of dogs licking up Ahab's blood that was washed off from his chariot, well that's a fulfillment of Elijah's prophecy in chapter 21, verse 19, with dogs licking up Ahab's blood.

And remember that impressive looking scene in the beginning of the story with the two kings on their two thrones? Compare that to the throne scene of God in Micaiah's prophecy in verse 19.

[ 27 : 45 ] Therefore, hear the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the hosts of heaven standing beside him on his right-hand side and on his left.

God's throne room is much, much bigger and much more impressive than Ahab's. It's all of God's heavenly army standing around him, ready for action.

Ahab thought he was in charge, but there is a higher throne. God is the one who's really in charge. For Micaiah, his unwavering convictions and his faithful ministry is cemented in the certainty of God's word.

And in a much more significant way than Ahab's demise, a Jesus ministry, death and resurrection is the ultimate fulfillment of prophecy in the Bible.

There are over 350 prophecies in the Old Testament that are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. So if Micaiah can have certainty in the fulfillment of God's word in a few, how much more can we have full confidence in Jesus?

[ 28 : 55 ] Jesus says, I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. Now perhaps our friends may object that that's just too narrow, too uninclusive.

surely there are other ways to heaven. But we can be fully confident that Jesus is the only way because he said that.

Now Islam may object that Jesus is not God but only a prophet. But we can be sure that the biblical account of Jesus is the only one true account of Jesus.

Jesus will one day return to judge and we won't know when he will return. so we can be sure he will return. So we must be ready. Therefore, if we are followers of Jesus today, we can persevere in proclaiming the gospel because we can be certain of the word of the Lord.

We can share the good news of Jesus confidently despite of the costs and the pressures to conform because we can be sure that his word is true.

[ 30 : 04 ] And friends, if we're still trying to make it on our own steam, insisting on doing it our own way, would we turn to consider the uncomfortable truth of the gospel that we are all sinners and stand condemned unless we repent and believe in Jesus?

It may not be what we want to hear, but it is what we need to hear. So we ought to hear the word of the Lord and proclaim the word of the Lord because the word of the Lord is certain.

Shall I pray? as the Lord lives, what the Lord says to me, that I will speak.

Our Heavenly Father, thank you that your word is truth in life. Thank you for providing Micaiah as a clear warning sign for us to turn back to you and also as an example to ministry.

Help us, like Micaiah, to cement our confidence deeper in the certainty of your word. Please would you cause us to love your word more fully and please would you help us to proclaim your gospel more courageously, despite the costs that we may lie ahead.

[ 31 : 32 ] In Jesus' name, Amen.