

1 Kings 22:1-28

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[0 : 00] Well, yes, this is quite a passage. We are continuing on this sermon series on Elijah.

And the funny thing about this chapter is there is no Elijah. He's nowhere to be seen. But God comes to Ahab yet again through a wonderful prophet named Micaiah, who is a real hero. He's a winsome figure, a prophet, who is known in the Old Testament because of what he did in this chapter, his courage and his clarity around God's word.

It is because he brings the gift of God's word that he is known today. And so I want to talk about God's word as a gift to us today.

Micaiah is a gift because he brings God's word to Ahab and to us. And what he does in this chapter, if you want to kind of break the chapter up, you would say that God's word is a gift because it is true.

[1 : 13] You see that in verses 1 through 14. We see that God's word is a gift because it judges, which is a little bit counterintuitive. It is a gift because it judges in verses 15 through 23.

And then if you jump down to 34 through 40, it is a gift because God's word is certain. His promises, his judgments are certain.

And the thing that is a challenge for us this morning as we meet together is that that word, that incredible gift can be rejected.

And that's verses 24 through 33 in the middle there. So I want to look at those things as we go through the story. I just want to unfold this story and show us how it really speaks to God's word being a gift and how it comes into our lives and actually turns them upside down.

It's a turmoil kind of thing. You know, Ahab, before we start here, Ahab, we hear six chapters of Ahab in 1 Kings, don't we?

[2 : 22] Why so much time spent on him? Well, over and over again, we see God coming to him, to speak to him, to call him to repentance.

We see God's mercy and his justice for the purpose of repentance. And when I was reading this, I thought of an extraordinary thing that happened to me years ago when I started ministry on the Sunshine Coast.

I used to pick up hitchhikers quite a bit. It was, I think, a bit safer because there was two ferries. You could only get there by ferry. So you sort of think, well, and I knew most of the people I was picking up.

But one of the guys I saw, he looked very forlorn. And the two churches I worked in were half hour apart. And I just left my church and was going to the other one.

And here was this guy. And I picked him up and asked him, well, tell me about what's happening. What do you do? He said, well, I've left from Quebec. And I'm going, I'm just leaving and I'm finding jobs and so forth.

[3 : 28] And I've just come from Prince Rupert. And the day before, 1,500 miles away. I said, wow, that's a long ways. I said, why are you doing this? He said, well, I'm leaving something behind in Quebec.

A tough situation. And I said, oh, really? Okay. And he said, now, what do you do? And I said, I'm a minister. And he said, nothing.

And he turned white. And I said, are you okay? He said, I got to tell you, I left from Prince Rupert yesterday. And the last four people who have picked me up were ministers.

You're the fourth one. Do you think God is telling me something? And I said, he very well may be.

And so he told me his story, how he'd left his family.

And he hadn't gone to church in many years. And I said, you know what, I think God is speaking to you. And I said, do you know, you know about who Jesus is, right?

[4 : 36] He said, no, not really. I said, well, you used to go to church? Yeah. So I told him about who Jesus is. It was the easiest evangelism I've ever had in my life, by the way. And when I dropped him off, he said, he said, God is speaking to me.

I need to go back to church. And that's the last I ever saw him again. Now, I pray that he did repent, that he did go back literally to his home, but also back home to God as well.

That man is a lot like Ahab. The difference is Ahab never repented. We know what happened with him. We heard about his temporary repentance last week.

But things have changed back again. And we know that God's judgment was simply deferred. And so what happens at the beginning of this lesson is that Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, the southern kingdom of God's people, comes to visit Ahab in the north.

And he tells them, look, the king of Syria has not followed through with his promise to follow through with a treaty that was made. He's got to give us this city. It's 50 kilometers over to the southeast on the way to Damascus.

[5 : 53] Or sorry, to the northeast. And we need that money. I'd love the money from the tolls of that trade route. And he said, Jehoshaphat, why don't you help me out here?

Why don't you and your army attack with me this city from Syria? And Jehoshaphat is a little naive. And he says, sure, I'll do it.

But he's also a godly king as well. And he knows something. He knows that God's word is a gift. And he says in verse 5, inquire first for the word of the Lord.

Inquire first for the word of the Lord. Should we battle against Ramoth Gilead or not? You see, he knows that it is all important to hear from God as he makes this huge decision.

He also knows that the darkest days of Israel were the days of silence. The days where God is not speaking. Where they do not hear him.

[6 : 55] There are no prophets. His word is not taught or preached. That is the darkest of times. He knows that the greatest gift from God that there can possibly be is to hear from him.

To hear his truth. To hear from the God who created all things. Who is Lord. Speaking personally to his people. There's no greater gift. And you know, Psalm 119 expresses this gift.

If you want to do some homework this week that will feed your soul forever. Read Psalm 119. The longest of all the Psalms. Because it is all about how much a gift.

How great a gift God's word is. Listen to these few verses. I think this is something that Jehoshaphat would be thinking of. I love your commandments above gold, above fine gold.

Your testimonies are wonderful. Therefore, my soul keeps them. The unfolding of your words give light. It imparts understanding to the simple. I open my mouth and pant because I long for your commandments.

[8 : 06] Turn to me and be gracious to me. As is your way with those who love your name. You see, Jehoshaphat deeply values God's word because it is true.

It gives light. It gives understanding. It is something that are God's very testimonies. Who knows everything about the universe intimately.

This meaning, this means that God's gift is the greatest of all that he could possibly receive. But Jehoshaphat's understanding of God's word as being true.

And this gift is not shared by Ahab. He knows that it is true. But he does not see it as a gift. So what does he do here?

He tries to hide from God's word by hiring about 400 prophets who claim to speak for God. But will only speak what pleases Ahab.

[9 : 05] Ahab. And those are the prophets that are gathered around Jehoshaphat and him. And they all say, absolutely, you should go forward. Do the battle of Ramoth-Gilead.

And the Lord is going to give that place to your hands. But you know, it does not have the ring of truth for Jehoshaphat. It sounds exactly like Ahab's word.

Not God's word. So, what does Jehoshaphat say? Is there not another prophet of the Lord of whom we may inquire? Isn't there just one more?

Well, yes, there is, Ahab says. It's Micaiah, the son of Imla. But I hate him. He never prophesies good concerning me. Only evil. Ahab is a modern-day king.

He is narcissistic. He thinks about himself. And it's got to be bad if it comes against me. But the reason, of course, that Micaiah always speaks evil, prophesies evil, is because Ahab is doing evil.

[10:11] And he cannot see it. He's got 400 impressive people telling him that he is good and wise and godly, which makes his blind spot, which, by the way, you and I all have in our sin, makes his blind spot so much bigger.

But, you see, God's word is precious here because it is true. It reveals your own blind spots, the sins that we deceive ourselves with, and when we say we have no sin.

That's not a sin. But 1 John 8, 1 John 1.8 says, If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. And the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, Jesus is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. You see, this is the ministry of Jesus to us.

It is the ministry of truth. You and I need him to minister to us in this way this morning. Because we, like Ahab, keep ourselves in the dark.

[11:16] We may even surround ourselves with people who tell us, You are right. You are true. You are good. We need God's precious word to reveal what God needs to forgive.

What he needs to cleanse and change in us. So that we can turn to him and receive that precious gift of life and fellowship in him.

And that's why Jehoshaphat says to Ahab, No, you've got to get Micaiah. We've got to have what is true, not what is popular. And Ahab sends an officer to bring him in.

Now it's a bit of a wait to get Micaiah into Samaria there at the gates. And I think that these gathered royal court all knew that Micaiah would probably say something disturbing.

And so they got together and had a fantastic worship service. The kings all dressed themselves up in their finery. And so did all the prophets as well.

[12:19] And it's all outside with everybody to see. They even had a multimedia presentation. They had Zedekiah show what would happen to the Syrians.

How they would be destroyed with these iron horns. And they all agreed this is God's will to go and triumph in Syria. And everybody was congratulating themselves in a marvelous worship service.

But when the officer brought Micaiah back or was bringing him back, he knew this wouldn't go well. He said, Micaiah, please, please, can you for once just agree with those prophets?

Agree with the king? Just say what he wants to hear. Just this one time. And you see, there's an assumption of this messenger. Which is the assumption of our world and many within our church. That we can mold and fashion God's word to suit our needs and our desires. You see, that messenger, that officer thinks God's word should be always affirming and never confronting.

[13:34] So that it can be accepted by as many people as possible. Does that sound familiar to you? There is strong preacher. This is a little secret I want to let you in on.

There is strong pressure on every preacher to do exactly that. In our society, in our church, we want people to accept the word that we are giving out.

We do not want people to be turned away. We do not want things to be disturbed. And churches and the world really have a strong, strong aversion to being turned upside down by God.

But that's the gift of God's truth and his word. And Micaiah, in verse 14, says words that are like smelling salts. To any preacher or to any of us.

Any mind that is tempted to hold back. And to compromise what the Bible says. To make it more popular. He says, as the Lord lives. What the Lord says to me.

[14:44] That will I speak. Now I think that that verse should be in the pulpit of every church. As the Lord lives. What the Lord says to me.

That I will speak. Speak. And you see. What Micaiah is saying. Is that God's word is precious to him. Because it is true. He is gripped by that word.

Because it is the word of the living God. And he says, you know. I really could do nothing other than speak what God has said. He has an audience of one.

And that is God himself. As he speaks. And I think that this should be our audience too. As we live our life. As we think of God's word. As we respond to it.

Who is our audience? Who is the most important audience in your life? Is it the people that you want to impress in this world? Is it people that you want to be attracted to you.

[15:42] Or to your ministry? Or is it God himself? Who speaks clearly. In his living word. Micaiah is showing us. That we have this immense privilege.

Of knowing God's living word written. We have the advantage over Micaiah. And our prayer should be. May God give us Micaiah's courage.

To stand for the gift. Of his true word. Well. When Micaiah comes before this impressive group of prophets. And kings. At the great gates of Samaria.

King Ahab asks that question again. And the writer must have smiled when he wrote down Micaiah's reply. Because he parroted exactly what the prophets had been saying. It was probably a bit.

Maybe a bit unexpected. It would have been a sarcastic tone. And with very little enthusiasm. Go up and triumph. The Lord will give it into the hand of the king.

[16:39] But the king said to him. How many times have I told you. Made you swear that you would speak to me nothing but the truth. In the name of the Lord.

You see. Again. He wants to hear God's truth. Even though. He's not going to really hold to that truth. He is. It is an empty holding. To God's word as truth.

And that is a temptation for us as well. We have God's word. Are we holding loosely to it? Isn't an empty holding to God's word? Well that brings us to the second point.

Because God's word is a gift because it judges. So Micaiah says. Okay. I'm going to tell you exactly what God's word is here. You have asked for it.

I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains. As sheep that have no shepherd. That's Israel. And the Lord said. Those have no master. Ahab is dead.

[17:40] Let each return to his home. In peace. So what does the king say to Jehoshaphat? Didn't I tell you? He would not prophesy good concerning me. But only evil.

I told you so. It's going to happen. So Micaiah goes on. He says. In verse 19 and following. There's another throne. It's greater than yours. Ahab.

And God is speaking from it. He has allowed a lying spirit to entice you Ahab. To attack Ramoth Gilead. Through Ahab's lying prophets.

So that disaster is going to come on to you. Now how is this God's gift. This judgment. Why could that be? Well there's a lot of reasons.

I'll just give two. The first is. That it shows that God puts a boundary on all evil. And he rules it by his word. It is only by his permission that this happens.

[18:36] He created that spirit. That ended up being corrupted and lie. It is only by his allowance that this spirit went. And he is by his power and his rule and authority.

He uses that corrupt spirit to accomplish his purposes. He does it in a mysterious way. In a way that we cannot imagine. But he is so powerful and so glorious.

That he uses that spirit. To bring about his good and right judgment. And that judgment secondly. Reveals to Ahab the magnitude of his sin.

That's why it's so powerful and wonderful. This judgment. It's like a search light. This is a troubling passage. Because it looks like God deceives Ahab. But the opposite is happening.

If you think about it. God is telling Ahab. You are being deceived. He tells him that. And God reveals that the lying spirit. Has entered into all those false prophets.

[19:44] And that you Ahab. Have oriented your life. Around that which is untrue. And it will bring disaster. It is the perfect judgment.

And you know. I don't know if you know what happened a week ago. But here we are in a time change day. And if you lived in the east part of Canada. And you were with Belle.

It may well have happened that your clocks were turned a week early. Now imagine what that does. When you wake up unsuspecting.

And find out that it's not actually nine o'clock. It's eight o'clock. Many people missed their meetings. They went to offices. And the door was locked. Until Belle finally corrected that problem.

People were orienting their life. Around something. That was not true. Around the wrong time. And this is what. This is exactly what was happening in Ahab's life as well.

[20:45] His life was built around. A lie. He had rejected the truth of God's word. And we might wonder. Why would God allow bad teachers in the church?

You see it all from the beginning of. In the New Testament. Beginning of the church till now.

Teachers that are false. Not telling true things. Again God is sovereign over even that.

If you were to look at Deuteronomy 13. Listen to these words. It says that if a prophet. Or a dreamer of dreams arises among you. And gives you a sign or wonder. And the sign or wonder that he tells you.

Come to pass. Wow that's impressive. He must be spiritual. And if he says. Let us go after other gods. Which you have not known. And let us serve them.

You shall not listen to the words of that prophet. Or that dreamer of dreams. For. The Lord God is testing you. To know whether you love the Lord your God.

[21 : 44] With all your heart. And with all your soul. You see false teachers. Push us. To look for what is right. To see what is right. When you see a counterfeit bill.

You appreciate and know. What the real thing is. What will Ahab do? God has revealed this to him. Will he love the Lord his God.

With all his heart. And with all his soul. Will we? Well sadly. The answer is no. Very resoundingly. Instead his chief prophet.

Zedekiah. Punches Micaiah in the face. You see this rejection of God. And his word. In the most stark terms possible. And Ahab sends him to jail.

This very vividly shows. That he is intolerant. Of God's justice. Even though it is the only thing. That will save him. And instead what he does.

[22 : 41] Is replaces it. With an alternative justice. An intolerant justice. An unmerciful justice. And you know. Our society is the same. Anything goes.

In the name of religion. Or spirituality. Except for. God's judgment. When we went into the crisis. In our own diocese.

The thing that we noticed happen. Is that we could not talk. You were not supposed to talk. About God's judgment. And in fact. That's taken out of creeds.

In liberal churches. The great danger. In doing this. Is that we will replace. God's judgment. With our own judgment. Without the mercy of God.

Without an open door. To repentance. And there's an essay. That was written recently. Called the New Puritans. By Ann Applebaum.

[23 : 33] And it's an unfortunate title. Because it's a character. Of Puritans. As judgmental. And repressive. Rather than the truth. That they were Christians. With extraordinary joy. And good. That they brought.

To the cultures. They lived in. They showed the fruits. Of the spirit. But listen to what she wrote. It's very revealing. She says. Social codes. Are changing. And in her view.

In many ways. For the better. But she says. She's not a Christian. But for those. Whose behavior. Doesn't adapt fast enough. To the new norms. Judgment can be swift.

And merciless. Right here in America. And I think probably Canada too. Right now. It's possible to meet people. Who have lost everything. Jobs. Money. Friends. Colleagues. After violating no laws. And sometimes no workplace rules either. Instead they have broken. Or accused of having broken. Social codes. Having to do with race. Sex. Personal behavior. Or even acceptable humor.

[24 : 28] Which may not have existed. Five years ago. Or even five months ago. Some have made egregious errors. Of judgment. Some have done nothing at all. It is not always easy.

To tell. This is searching. You see. Judgment without mercy. Replaces the gift. Of the perfect judgment of God. When his word.

Is ignored. That's. That's what is happening. With Ahab. But wonderfully. In Jesus. In the gospel. Jesus. Justice. And mercy.

Meet together. He reveals the terrible consequence of sin. As he did with Ahab. Our sin. But he takes it upon himself. And he gives to us the only way.

To life. Which is his mercy. And his forgiveness. His love. Tis mercy all. Immense and free. For oh my God. It found out me.

[25 : 25] And I want to close. By this last little point. And one for us to think of. As we think of God's gift. As being true. As being just.

And that is God's word is certain. You know Ahab's last words to Micaiah. Before he goes off to war. Is his final rejection. He says. Put this fellow in prison.

Feed him meager rations. Until I come in peace. And I love what Micaiah says. He says. If you return in peace.

The Lord has not spoken to me. And then he said. Hear. All you prophets. Now that. Is confidence. He is speaking alone. To a royal court. With all its power. And overwhelming numbers. And he is confident. Because he has clearly heard God's word. He has known God.

[26 : 20] In his word. He knows. He really only has an audience of one. It is God himself. God is his hope. His certain hope. His identity. His approval.

That God. Has spoken. And it is the greatest gift. Because it's true. Because it will happen. Amen. So what do we do with this?

We ask for God's help. God help us. To receive your word. As the extraordinary gift. That it is. Lord help us. As you speak personally.

To us. To know that you are the God. Who created all things. You created us. You sustain us. Everything about us. And you are the God.

Of truth. God give us grace. As you contradict. Us by your word. From time to time. Give us that humility. With all.

[27 : 16] Which only your Holy Spirit. Can give. As we hear your living word. And most of us father. Most of all father. Grant us. Your confidence. In a world.

Where. People who hold to your word. Are in the minority. Father. Give us grace. That we might stand. For that word. And know the joy.

Of your salvation. In Jesus name we ask. Amen.