

1 Kings 22:1-28 (PM)

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[0 : 00] 1 Kings 22 And Willie and Ross, it's a tremendous honor to be able to open God's word for your ordination.

Willie and Ross, two young up-and-comers here at St. John's. You know what, watch out for these two. I think they might actually amount to something. Willie and Ross, taking your vows tonight as deacons, as servants of the flock, the flock of Christ on behalf of our shepherd Jesus Christ. And I think you both know already how quickly the vocation of pastor becomes muddled. Becomes muddled.

Are you going to be a CEO? Are you going to be a fundraiser, a motivational speaker? Are you being ordained to be a therapist or a social worker? Brothers, above all else, you are stewards of the word of God and heralds of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And so the prophet Micaiah is a wonderful role model for you in your ministry. But this story is not just for pastors only.

[1 : 43] Chapter 22 is a mini-theology of the word of God for us as a church. As we seek to live under the authority of God's word in a generation where we experience tremendous pressure to mute or mutate the power of the gospel message.

And here in the example of Micaiah, we are warned about some of these pressures, these pressures that we face. We all face them. Not just clergy.

And we're reminded of the priority that we must stand up for. So I have two simple headings for us. The preacher's pressure and the preacher's priority.

Let's have a look at some of these pressures. So we're introduced to Micaiah in the midst of a very intimidating scene for a prophet of the Lord. King Ahab of Israel, King Jehoshaphat of Judah are gathering for war and they're looking for confirmation from the Lord to go into battle.

Verse 5, look with me. Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, Inquire first for the word of the Lord. Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about 400 men, and said to them, Shall I go to battle against Ramoth Gilead or shall I refrain?

[2 : 58] So Ramoth Gilead is this lucrative trade route town. It's a sort of toll booth for collecting GST. And so there's a lot of pressure on these prophets to agree with the king.

Which is exactly what the 400 false prophets do. Verse 6 continues, And they said, Go up, for the Lord will give you, we'll give it into the hand of the king. But Jehoshaphat is a wiser man.

He smells a rat. He says, Do we have a second opinion or maybe a 401st opinion here? Do you have anybody else? Jehoshaphat says in verse 7, Is there not here another prophet of the Lord whom we may inquire?

And the king of Israel, that's Ahab, he's a sulk. There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord, Micaiah, the son of Imla, but I hate him. He never prophesies good concerning me, but evil. He's such a Debbie Downer. You see, some people will hate the true gospel preacher. Because God's word does not only bring good news, but also bad news.

[4 : 07] Bad news which requires repentance. God's word confronts our confirmation bias with the truth. The gospel preacher will be hated by some, just as Micaiah is hated by Ahab, because they preach a message which confronts our sinful rebellion and our idolatry.

Which is what Paul warns Timothy of, this pressure in 2 Timothy 4. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.

They will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. Martin Luther addressed this temptation directly. This is Luther speaking.

Also, it does not help that one of you would say, I will gladly confess Christ and his word on every detail, except that I may keep silent about one or two things which my tyrants may not tolerate. In other words, if you preach the gospel in all aspects, with the exception of those difficult and uncomfortable topics, most disputed and attacked in this generation, you aren't preaching the gospel at all.

[5 : 23] So with so much pressure on the preacher, on all of us, as we try to share our faith and live it out, it's not surprising that some people will just beg us, please just tone it down a little for the sake of unity, won't you?

So verse 13, the messenger who went to summon Micaiah said to him, Behold, the words of the prophet with one accord are favorable to the king. Let your word be like the word of one of them and speak favorably.

In other words, Micaiah, please, buddy, let me give you some friendly advice. Read the room. It's 400 against one. Live to fight another day. You don't have to be an ordained minister to feel that kind of pressure.

There is tremendous pressure on all of us to conform to changes in our society's values around things like sex and gender, euthanasia, abortion. Just for a few examples.

How do we speak up in our workplaces or in our child's schools when it just seems to create so much division and anger in response? And yes, we speak the truth in love, as Paul commands in Ephesians 4.

[6 : 31] That's a good starting place. And yet, we also know that persecution will be part of that pressure that we're under. And we don't run from this. Peter says, Rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

So Zedekiah strikes Micaiah on the cheek in response to the truth. And King Ahab persecutes the prophet further in verse 26. Seize Micaiah, take him back to Ammon, the governor of the city, and to Joash, the king's son.

And say, Thus says the king, not thus says the Lord, thus says the king, put this fellow in prison, feed him meager rations of bread and water until I come back in peace. These then are just a few of the preacher's pressures.

The intimidation of being outnumbered by false teachers. The hatred from those who only want to hear good news instead of the truth. Pressure to avoid applying the gospel to critical areas in our culture today.

And the temptation to avoid persecution and suffering for the sake of pleasing those in power. Yet against all those pressures, the prophet Micaiah remains committed to his priority to faithfully proclaim the word of God.

[7 : 50] So let's have a brief look at the preacher's priority. Verse 14 is the key verse here. Key verse of the chapter. The prophet's job description. But Micaiah said, As the Lord lives, what the Lord says to me, that I will speak.

What is it really that Ahab and his messenger both assume about God's word? They assume that the prophet controls the word, chooses the message.

But the preacher doesn't manipulate God's word to be liked by the congregation. And the congregation does not pick and choose which parts of God's word they want to obey and which parts are better ignored.

So here's 2 Timothy again. I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead and by his appearing in his kingdom, preach the word, be ready in season and out of season.

Reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching. The preacher's priority is to proclaim the gospel of salvation and judgment.

[9 : 06] We see this as an example in verse 17. Micaiah 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. So the prophecy is judgment against Ahab the shepherd. He will die in battle, leaving the sheep to scatter.

We see that fulfilled by the end of the chapter. Yet at the same time as judgment on Ahab, it's also salvation for Israel. Because these have no master. Let each return to his home in peace.

Why peace? Because Ahab's been a very wicked king. If you've been with us for this series in One Kings, you know that already. He's led God's people into conflict and idolatry and chaos.

So his death is a reprieve for Israel, a type of salvation. Furthermore, the preacher's priority is to spotlight the person behind the message.

[10:10] The person behind the message. And that's what Micaiah does in verse 19. Micaiah said, Therefore, hear the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting on his throne and all the host 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? Look, see, the Lord is on his throne.

This is the glory of God behind the gospel message. Share the good news. And as you do so, shine that spotlight on the holiness and the beauty and the loving kindness of our triune God.

Make sure that the hearer hears the word in order to see the word made flesh. Jesus the Logos. Jesus the Logos, the wisdom of God. God in his wisdom, using the very mouthpieces of false prophets here in chapter 22, entices the king and guarantees Ahab's judgment and death.

[11:18] God in his wisdom, using the lies of Satan, and Judas and Caiaphas to guarantee our salvation and life by the death of Christ on the cross.

This is the preacher's priority. Micaiah said, As the Lord lives, what the Lord says to me, that I will speak. Preach the full message. Salvation and judgment.

And preach the person behind that message. The glory of God on display in the face of Jesus Christ. I so appreciate that Micaiah is a stranger to us.

That besides this brief appearance, in just one chapter in all of Scripture, we know nothing about this man. There's no superhero origin story for him. What a great reminder that God calls each and every one of us to faithfully hear and proclaim his life-giving word.

So, Willie and Ross, above all else, you are stewards of the word of God and heralds of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. And may the prophet Micaiah be an inspiration to you and a guiding light for you in your ministry.

[12:35] And as a congregation, all of us, we must pray for one another that the Holy Spirit will give us courage to resist those pressures to mute and mutate the precious gospel message.

And we must pray for one another that the name of our triune God will be vindicated and glorified in this time and in this place as it was in the days of Micaiah the prophet.

Amen. Amen.