

The Pressure of the Truth

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[0 : 00] Well, later in our service, we look forward to Edward Law opening God's Word with us together. We'll be looking together at 1 Kings chapter 22, and we'll be reading from verse 1, and we'll continue through to verse 40, which is slightly further than what the screen says.

That's 1 Kings 22, page 304 through to 305. Please do turn that up if you have a Bible. If you don't have one, raise your hand, and one of the members of our welcome team would be happy to bring a copy to you.

So 1 Kings chapter 22, beginning at the start of the chapter. 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.

[1 : 21] And 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?

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 the Lord of whom we may inquire?

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 prophesied 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, 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 the son of Chinana made for himself horns of iron and said, thus says the Lord, with these you shall push the Syrians until they are destroyed.

[2 : 38] 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 who went to summon Micaiah said to him, behold, the words of the prophets with one accord are favorable to the king. Let your word be like the word of one of them and speak favorably.

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 in the mountains as sheep that have no shepherd. And the Lord said, these have no master. Let each return to his home in peace.

[3 : 48] And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil? And 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?

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 to him, by what means?

And he said, I will go out and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, you're 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.

[4 : 53] Then Zedekiah, the son of Chenanah, came near and struck Micaiah on the cheek and said, how did the spirit of the Lord go from me to speak to you? 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 to 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 peoples. 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.

But the king of Syria had commanded the 32 captains of his chariots, fight with neither small nor great, but only with the king of Israel. And when the captains of the chariot saw Jehoshaphat, they said, it is surely the king of Israel.

[6 : 12] So they turned to fight against him. And Jehoshaphat cried out. And when the captains of the chariot 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 armor 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 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 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.

[7 : 20] 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 book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? So Ahab slept with his fathers.

And Ahaziah, his son, reigned in his place. Amen. This is the word of the Lord. Well, good morning, friends.

Very good to see you all here. And hello also to those listening in other places. Now, an important reminder, just before we start. Easter was a week ago, but our Easter offering from the church is still open to receive gifts.

And this year we are sending our offering to Maxwell Church at Kilmores in Ayrshire. Now the reason for that, and most of you know this, is that our own Andrew Whitmarsh, that was Andrew who's been up here for the last few minutes, Andrew has just been appointed as its new minister. His appointment was confirmed last Sunday with an enthusiastic vote, I think, from the congregation. So Andrew and Laura and baby Martha will be moving there in the fairly near future.

[8 : 32] But the church left its former denomination recently and has joined the Didasco Presbytery, the presbytery that we belong to. But the church had to leave behind a lot of their assets for that reason.

And they have no manse. That is, minister's house. So our Easter gift is to go to the church to help them to buy a property for Andrew and his family to live in, so that they might be comfortable.

So do give generously to this. It's in a very good cause indeed. Good. Well, let's turn now to 1 Kings chapter 22. And if you have one of those hardback church Bibles, I think you'll find it on page 304.

1 Kings 22. My title for today is The Pressure of the Truth. And we'll see from our passage that the truth presses itself both on those who gladly submit to it and in a quite different way on those who resist it.

The story before us today is fundamentally a story about the power of the word of God. And although these events in 1 Kings 22 took place nearly 3,000 years ago, the implications of this story need to be heard and heeded by the modern church.

[9 : 54] Now, just a few words on the historical situation here will, I think, help us to understand what is going on. The year is approximately 850 BC. There are two monarchs involved.

There's Ahab, king of Israel, and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. Now, the kingdom of Israel, the whole kingdom, had been a united nation state during the reigns of David and Solomon.

But when Solomon died in about 920 BC, the kingdom then split into two. Israel in the north with its capital at Samaria and Judah in the south with its capital at Jerusalem.

And the two kingdoms were largely at loggerheads with each other. It was an uneasy relationship and there was a constant threat of warfare or at least skirmishes.

And yet, both of these kingdoms were Jewish. They were all descended from Abraham. They were sister kingdoms. And yet, they were living under very different regimes.

[10 : 54] Rather like North and South Korea today. One people, but harshly divided under very different systems of government. Israel, the northern kingdom, had given way to idolatry.

And yet, they retained a veneer of true Mosaic faith. So, they continued to speak of the Lord, Yahweh. There was a pretense, at least, of fidelity to the law of Moses.

Judah, by contrast, stayed much closer to the true faith of Israel. Now, that's not to say that everyone living in Judah was a card-carrying true blue law of Moses citizen.

There was plenty of idolatry in Judah as well. But they retained Jerusalem as their capital. And the great temple of the Lord, built by Solomon in the previous century, remained the focus of their national life and worship.

As for Ahab and Jehoshaphat themselves, their character and their style of leadership are summed up in a very few words here in 1 Kings.

[11 : 56] The summary of Jehoshaphat's reign is found in this chapter, at verse 43. That is a good obituary.

Ahab's reign is summed up for us a few chapters earlier. Chapter 16, verse 30. Ahab, the son of Omri, did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him.

That is a bad obituary. But those two summary assessments give us an idea of what we're dealing with in chapter 22. Well, let's get into this story.

It is one of the most gripping stories of the Old Testament. And if we can feel the force of it, we shall not remain quite the same sort of people. I want to walk us through the story, trying to bring out the flavor of it and its implications.

And then towards the end of the sermon, I'll try to express the chief lessons for us to bear in mind today. So verse 1. Syria. Syria. Syria was a long-standing enemy of Israel.

[13 : 08] But there had been three years of peace between these old rivals. However, Syria, in years gone by, had annexed a part of Israel's territory to the east of the River Jordan.

When I say annexed, that means they'd taken it by force. And this piece of territory included the important city of Ramoth-Gilead. But, verse 2, in that third year of peace between Israel and Syria, Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, thought it would be a good thing to visit King Ahab.

Jehoshaphat was a godly king, and he knew full well that Ahab was anything but a godly king. But Jehoshaphat, although godly, seems to have been naive and over-optimistic.

He perhaps had a romantic notion that Israel and Judah could perhaps establish a trajectory of better relationships, which might even lead to their eventual reunion.

In fact, we discover in 2 Kings, chapter 8, that Jehoshaphat arranged for his own son to marry a daughter of King Ahab.

[14 : 14] Her name was Athaliah. If you're going to sup with the devil, you need a longer spoon than that. It was a foolish thing for Jehoshaphat to do. He was godly, but he was naive.

Anyway, Jehoshaphat pays Ahab this visit. The action in verses 1 to 5 seems to take place in Ahab's own palace. Chronicles recalls they had a great banquet together.

It moves to a more public place when we get to verse 6. So verse 3, Ahab and Jehoshaphat are sitting together, and they've shared the meal. Perhaps they've shared a Havana cigar together.

It's what kings and presidents do at the end. And a number of the king's servants are standing around waiting for the king's commands. And Ahab says to his servants, petulantly, Do you know that Ramoth-Gilead belongs to us, but we're keeping quiet, and we're doing nothing to take it back,

get it back from the king of Syria?

The servants, unsurprisingly, say nothing. So Ahab turns to Jehoshaphat and says, Will you go with me to battle at Ramoth-Gilead? No doubt, the king of Judah's mind works pretty hard at this point for about two seconds.

[15:27] He might have said to himself, If I say yes, am I committing thousands of my troops to potential slaughter? If I say no, my dreams of better relationships with Israel may be thwarted.

Yes, he says, yes. With apparent great magnanimity. I am as you are. My people as your people. My horses as your horses. In other words, we're in this together.

We're brothers. We're all Israelites. Let's go against these Syrians, and we will redden their noses. You see, Ahab is seeing red. His blood is up. And Jehoshaphat colludes with him.

However, verse 5, Jehoshaphat is truly a man who trusts the Lord. So he says to King Ahab, Enquire first for the word of the Lord.

In other words, let's not be too hasty. This is a big enterprise. We need to know if the Lord endorses this plan or not. So, verse 6. The scene now shifts to an open area described in verse 10 as the threshing floor at the gate of Samaria.

[16:32] So there's plenty of space for a large crowd to gather. So Ahab sends messengers all around the city, summoning everyone who belongs to the guilds of the prophets. The king requires your attendance at the threshing floor right now.

So they come. Verse 6 says there are about 400 of them. Now, just a word about these prophets. They profess to be prophets of the Lord, as we will see in a moment.

They're not like the prophets of Baal, whom Elijah had to face back in chapter 18. No, these are men who are holding on to some veneer of worshipping the true God of Israel, just as Ahab himself retains a veneer of worshipping the true God.

So there are the 400 men gathered at the city gate. On a raised platform are set two thrones. We find this out in verse 10.

And the two kings, having put on their splendid royal robes so as to introduce an air of authority and power, are sitting on their thrones, raised up above the 400. And the 400 are waiting.

[17:39] It's a tense moment. These kings of old, after all, had the power of life and death over their citizens. It was wise to agree with the king's wishes. And these 400 men knew exactly what was making Ahab's blood boil at this moment.

So when he said to them in verse 6, Shall I go to battle against Ramoth-Gilead, or shall I refrain? They became yes-men to a man. They said, Yes, yes, go up, for the Lord will give Ramoth-Gilead into the hand of the king.

Three cheers for the king. Hurrah for the Lord. Amen. Hallelujah. That was the atmosphere that was created here. Jehoshaphat, however, smells a rat.

Now he may be naive, but he is truly a godly king, and the rat smells bad to him. So he has the courage to turn to Ahab in verse 7 and to say, Is there not here another prophet of the Lord of whom we may inquire?

In other words, I've got a nasty feeling that we've not really heard what God has to say about this proposed campaign. Now, look at Ahab's reply in verse 8.

[18:48] It's a grudging reply which comes out through gritted teeth. Yes, he says, Now, there is one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord. This bloke's name is Micaiah, son of Imla.

But I hate him, for he never prophesies any good concerning me, but evil. Jehoshaphat replies soothingly, Don't let the king say that. Now, just notice that Ahab's words in verse 8 reveal that he and Micaiah have history.

The king says he never prophesies good concerning me. In other words, I've listened to him on a number of occasions, and he never tells me what I want to hear. His agenda, confound him, appears to be something other than to please his sovereign.

But, deep in his crooked soul, Ahab knows that Micaiah is a man of God who tells the truth. So, in verse 9, he sends an officer to fetch Micaiah quickly.

Ahab is against the word of God. He can't stand the candor of it, the honesty of it. But there's something inside him that wants to know it. In that way, he's a bit like King Herod, who often listened to John the Baptist, but ended up executing him.

[20:04] Or like the governor Felix in the Acts of the Apostles, who found Paul's teaching very intriguing, and yet he kept him in prison. Billy Graham was a straight and true man of God, and a

number of American presidents used to consult him when they were facing grave political difficulties.

So, back to verse 9. Micaiah is sent for, but it takes a little time for the messenger to find him. Now, what is happening at the threshing floor in the meantime?

Verses 10 to 12 tell us, The two kings are sitting on their thrones, and the 400 prophets are making a lot of noise. Old Testament prophets gathering in groups would often all be speaking at the same time, working themselves up into some kind of a frenzy.

And one of them emerges as a leader, Zedekiah, the son of Chanaana. He's obviously been at work in his workshop at the bottom of his garden, where he has a fireplace and a forge.

He might have been a blacksmith. Anyway, premeditated, he has brought along a pair of horns, bull's horns made of iron, and he's holding them up to his head, and he's prancing around like a Spanish fighting bull.

[21 : 21] And look at what he says in verse 11. Thus says the Lord. Thus says the Lord. You see, he's aping the true prophet. He's using the form of words which the true prophet used. Thus says the Lord.

With these horns, you shall push the Syrians until they're destroyed. And in verse 12, all the other prophets join in, and they too use the name of the Lord to undergird their prophecy.

There's a sense of mob hysteria. There's a horrible cacophony. Meantime, verse 13, Abraham's messenger finds Micaiah, and he says to him, now I'm translating here rather freely, Look, mate, a word to the wise.

All these prophets are sucking up to the king, if you want to keep your head on your shoulders, you'd be well advised to agree with them. But Micaiah replies, As the Lord lives, that's a mild form of oath.

As the Lord lives, I will say what the Lord says to me, nothing else. Verse 14 tells us that we're dealing here with a courageous man. So he comes to the king in the next verse, and the king says, Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-Gilead to battle, or shall we refrain?

[22 : 38] And Micaiah replies, his words dripping with sarcasm. We've got to understand that. He replies, Oh, go up and triumph. The Lord will give it into the hand of the king.

Ahab, of course, immediately reads the sarcasm. So he says, How many times shall I make you swear that you speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?

Oh, it's the truth you want, your majesty. Ha! You could knock me down with a feather. All right, I'll give you the truth now that you ask for it. I saw all Israel, verse 17, 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. Why have they no shepherd? Because he's just been killed in battle.

It's a prophecy. Now, these words may well have sent a shiver across Ahab's heart, but he toughs it out. And he says to Jehoshaphat, Didn't I tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?

[23 : 43] But Micaiah has not finished. Verse 17 has merely been the curtain raiser. The main prophecy begins at verse 19.

Therefore, he says, 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? One said one thing, another said another. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, saying, I will entice him.

The Lord said, By what means? And he said, I will go out and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And the Lord 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.

[24 : 47] People sometimes struggle over this prophecy and misread it. Somebody might ask, But isn't it unfair of Yahweh to deceive Ahab? We need to read the prophecy rather carefully.

There is no deception of Ahab going on here at all. Quite the contrary. Through Micaiah, the Lord is telling Ahab clearly and exactly what is going on.

Namely, that he is being lured to his own death by his own prophets. The Lord is telling Ahab exactly what the Lord is doing. He is telling him that these 400 prophets are deceiving him.

But Ahab has closed his heart to the true word of the Lord and Micaiah knows it. And that's why he says at the end of verse 23, the Lord has declared disaster for you.

So what happens next? Zedekiah is incensed that Micaiah has contradicted his own prophecy of victory. So he approaches Micaiah and slaps him across the mouth.

[25 : 50] Jesus was slapped in the face, wasn't he? Paul the apostle was slapped in the mouth. It goes with the territory. If you don't want the heat, stay out of the kitchen.

And Zedekiah then says tauntingly to Micaiah, how did the spirit of the Lord go from me to speak to you? Meaning, I am the spirit-filled man around here.

How dare you oppose me? And Micaiah replies, you'll find out on the day when you go into your little box room and hide. Meaning, when Ahab falls, Ahab loyalists like you may well be pursued and purged out of the land.

You'll realize then that it was I, not you, who spoke by the spirit of the Lord when everything that I am prophesying comes true. In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses explains that the mark of the false prophet is that his prophecies don't come true.

But a true prophet's words are indeed fulfilled. But does Ahab listen to the truth from Micaiah's mouth? He does not. He says in verse 26, seize Micaiah, take him back to Amon, the governor of the city, and to 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.

[27 : 15] And Micaiah says, if you return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me. And then with great courage, he turns to the whole crowd and he says, here, all you peoples, in other words, mark my words, await events, and then you will know whether or not I've spoken the word of God.

Well, the final section of the chapter then tells us what happened and shows us how Micaiah was vindicated. The two kings, they set off to Ramoth-Gilead, backed by their armies, and in verse 30, Ahab says to Jehoshaphat, you go into battle with your kingly robes on, but I'll disguise myself. I'll wear the clothes of an ordinary soldier. It's a strange thing, isn't it? But surprisingly, Jehoshaphat goes along with it. I think I'd have been a bit more circumspect if I'd been Jehoshaphat.

But clearly, Ahab has heard, perhaps from his intelligence officers, what the king of Syria has said in verse 31, and that is, target the king of Israel. On those battlefields of old, if the king leading his army into battle was killed, almost certainly his soldiers would turn tail and flee for home.

The king was key to victory. Kill the enemy king and you've won the day. So, battle is joined in verse 32. Jehoshaphat, sitting in his chariot, wearing his kingly regalia, is quickly spotted and targeted.

[28 : 49] So he starts to yell. Presumably, he shouts, ah, it's a case of mistaken identity. I am not the king of Israel. So they turn away and allow him to live.

But if Ahab seriously thought that he could avoid the Lord's decree of disaster, simply by changing his clothes, he was mistaken. God is never mocked.

As one commentator has put it, Ahab was plated all over with iron and brass, but there is always a crevice through which God's arrow can find its way.

verse 34. A certain man, a Joe Bloggs soldier in the Syrian army, just happened to take a random shot at an enemy chariot and the arrow found its mark.

The best armor on the battlefield could offer no protection. It was not the order of the king of Syria that brought death to King Ahab. It was the decree of the Lord spoken by the true prophet in verse 23.

[29 : 53] So in verses 1 to 28, we see the word of the Lord being rejected, but in the second half of the story, we see the word of the Lord being fulfilled.

The word of the Lord ultimately will destroy the man who defies it and that is as true today as it was back then. Well, back to verse 34.

The wounded Ahab groans to his chariot driver. Turn around. Carry me out of the battle. I'm wounded. So they retreat just a little way from the fierce fighting and then Ahab gets his driver to prop him up at the back of the chariot.

He may have been a godless king, but he was brave and he faced the Syrians until he died at evening and the bottom of his chariot was awash with his blood.

And at sunset, verse 36, cries resounded across the battlefield. Go home, everybody. Back to your own city. We're not even told who won the battle because it's not important.

[30 : 58] This chapter is about the word of the Lord, how it must prevail, how it cannot be resisted. It's not about some minor military campaign. The thing that Ahab had tried to avoid by disguising himself, the thing that the king of Syria had tried to achieve by strategy was actually brought about by God himself in fulfillment of his own prophecies.

Not only the prophecy of Micaiah, but earlier prophecies as well. Look at verse 37. So the king died and was brought to Samaria and they buried the king in Samaria.

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.

The word that came by Micaiah but also by Elijah in chapter 21, very similar prophecy and by another prophet in chapter 20. And verse 39 is very telling.

It's telling us there that there's a lot else that Ahab did during his reign. He built a fantastic ivory house. How many elephants gave their eye teeth to fund that little project?

[32 : 11] And he built many cities. But the reader needs to look elsewhere for information about all that side of his life. That's not the concern of the author of 1 Kings. His concern is to teach the reader that the word of the Lord will always prevail and that the one who defies it will be destroyed by it.

Well at this point we'll change gear and we'll start to ask what we can learn from this story for our own generation. Here's a first question.

What does the modern Christian and the modern congregation have in common with an Old Testament prophet like Micaiah? The answer is a great deal.

Now we're not like Micaiah at one level. That is to say we're not prophets. The true prophet in the Old Testament would open his mouth and he would say thus says the Lord and then he would bring a new true message from God himself.

So the true prophet was a channel of fresh revelation that conveyed God's will and word to the people who needed to hear it. You and I are not prophets in that sense.

[33 : 22] The word of God that is addressed to us in our contemporary situation is the whole Bible. We have everything that God has to say to the modern world in the Old and New Testaments.

Now to be sure it needs to be read and taught and opened up to us so that we can feel the force of it. So we need teachers and preachers and gifted commentators to help us to grasp the message. But we don't need fresh revelation. So if somebody like me were to start saying oh I'm a prophet you know and you need to recognize me as such and what my anointed mouth is bringing to you is a fresh revelation.

Well if I tried to speak like that the only thing being revealed would be that I'm a conceited ass. We have a full perfect final sufficient revelation of God's will in our Bibles.

We don't need more. So we're not prophets in the way that Micaiah was but in just about every other way our position is exactly like Micaiah's.

[34 : 22] We are to be guardians of God's words. We're to be teachers of God's words all of us at one level or another and we have the responsibility of living out the implications of God's words in our individual lives and our life as a congregation.

The life of a healthy church is dominated by the Bible. We're shaped by the words of God. We're fired up by the words of God. We are defined by the words of God.

So what particular lessons can we draw from Micaiah's example? Let me suggest three. First the word of God is free but the true believer is in bondage to it.

Just look at Micaiah's brief utterance in verse 14. It's almost the most important verse in the story. As the Lord lives what the Lord says to me that I will speak.

And he says this in a position of great pressure on him. In verse 13 the king's messenger exerts enormous pressure on him to conform to conform to what you might call the religious establishment.

[35 : 34] the man says to him look 400 registered licensed prophets are all in agreement with the king's wishes. You'd be very unwise to swim against the stream my friend.

These 400 prophets they're not prophets of Baal they're prophets who prophesy in the name of the God of Israel. That's a sharp lesson for us in all this. All that glitters is not gold.

All that professes to be good and true and pious is not necessarily good and true especially when it wears religious dress and speaks in the name of the true God in the name of Christ.

So we have to learn to be discerning. We have to exercise a biblically shaped assessment of things. Naivety must be left behind. Micaiah could have said to the king's message well in whose name are these prophets prophesying?

And the man might have said well in the Lord's name of course and Micaiah might have replied well in that case I'm sure that their position is sound. The Lord's name is being honored. But Micaiah knew that the Lord's name was not being honored and he was not prepared to shift his ground.

[36 : 45] Verse 14 expresses a godly stubbornness and we need to learn that kind of stubborn unshiftability. All the men here today were I think boys once.

I gather. And most boys get into fights at school from time to time. I certainly did have a few battles when I was at school. Believe it or not I was quite a big boy for my age.

At the time I was a bit rough on the meat pies and the chocolate puddings. I think I've downsized a bit since then but I learned back then when fighting that if I placed my feet at just the right angle I couldn't be shifted even if a biggish opponent came rather hard at me.

And Micaiah was like that. He wasn't going to be shifted even when the opposition was coming rather hard at him because he was in bondage to the word of God. He was not free to ignore it and he was not free to change it.

Even Jesus to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given was at one level in bondage to the word of God. For example do you remember his words to Peter in the garden of Gethsemane just as he was being placed under arrest?

[38 : 02] He said to Peter do you think that I can't appeal to my father and he will at once send me more than 12 legions of angels? But how then should the scriptures be fulfilled that it must be so?

Jesus knew that his imminent death must be so. He must submit to it because the Old Testament spelt out that necessity. The Lord of heaven and earth was in bondage to the word of God.

For us it's the only safe position to be in. The Bible teaches such and such and therefore we stick with such and such and even if sticking to it should cost us dearly we can rejoice deep in our hearts that we're in line with God's will and we know that God will honor those who honor him.

The world probably won't honor us but God will and we have to choose in the end whether we value his approval or the world's approval. So there's the first thing.

The true believer is in bondage to the word of God. Second, this is a necessary consequence of being in bondage to the word of God. The true believer must be willing to endure isolation and suffering.

[39 : 18] This is what happened to Micaiah. Because he all on his own had the boldness to disagree with the 400 prophets and with the powerful king he was immediately sent to prison.

Ahab said, seize Micaiah. Thus says the king, put this fellow in prison and feed him short rations of bread and water until I come in peace. And away went Micaiah and we never hear of him again.

We have no assurance that he was subsequently released. But he was prepared to suffer isolation and hatred rather than be untrue to the word of God. He was prepared to be deeply unpopular.

So what are the main issues facing us today which will test whether or not we're willing to suffer isolation and hatred rather than be untrue to the word of God?

First, there are the issues of sexuality and gender. Homosexual activity, whenever it's mentioned in the Bible, is shown to be deeply contrary to the will of God.

[40 : 29] Christians who are tempted in that kind of direction must pray for grace to withstand the tempter. Transgenderism is based on the false premise that it's possible for a man to become a woman or for a woman to become a man.

Anybody with even an elementary knowledge of biology knows that a person's gender is given to them in the womb. As Genesis 1 teaches us, God made them male and female.

There's the issue of abortion which we've thought a little bit about already today. Somehow the idea has taken hold in many people's minds that it's a serious crime to kill an infant after it's left the womb.

And yet it's no crime at all to kill an infant when it's still developing in the womb. The failure of logic there is breathtaking. But the sixth of God's Ten Commandments stands.

You shall do no murder. Then there's the issue of judgment and salvation. Fundamental, fundamental to the teaching of the whole Bible is that God, loving the world, will save those who put their trust in the Savior, but must and will condemn those who refuse the Savior.

[41 : 44] Now, Christian people can be tempted to fudge the issue because they don't want to be unpopular. There's the issue of the uniqueness of Christianity. The Bible teaches with absolute clarity that Christ is the only way to God.

Jesus himself says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me. So the Christian who is in bondage to the Word of God has to learn that all other types of religion are false faiths.

Then there's the issue of the Bible itself. Is the Bible really everything we need in order to understand the gospel and the Christian life? Or is it perhaps a little bit lacking, a bit elderly and moth-eaten?

Does it maybe need a helping hand from philosophers and historians and astrophysicists? The Bible's own teaching is that the law of the Lord is perfect.

These are the main big issues today. If we stand firm on these things, we will suffer. People will reject us and write us off as extremists.

[42 : 57] We will feel isolated. But it's better to have the approval of God than the praises of the world. remember what Jesus said to his disciples. Blessed are you when people hate you and exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil on account of the Son of Man.

Rejoice in that day. Rejoice and leap for joy for behold, your reward is great in heaven. But woe to you when all men speak well of you for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

Well just one more thing from Micaiah's story which I'd like us to notice. And that is that the majority opinion is not necessarily the right one.

Micaiah found himself in a very small minority. One against 400. But his view and attitude was the one that God commended, not the view of the 400.

in the modern world there's great pressure on all of us to accept and swallow the majority view on all of the critical issues that I mentioned a moment ago, particularly the issues of sexuality and gender.

[44 : 15] In a Marxist nation, everybody has to agree with apparent enthusiasm with the party line. If they don't, they're denounced.

And they have to suffer serious penalties, loss of employment, loss of income, loss of status, loss of liberty, sometimes loss of life. The chief weapon of tyranny is to make people very much afraid.

Tyranny makes people think, I dare not speak out against the majority opinion. If I want to survive, I must keep my mouth shut. this is the kind of tyranny which is imposing itself on modern Britain.

And people in positions of leadership are afraid to stand up to it. It's true in parliament, in business, particularly in our schools and universities.

University professors are losing their jobs, even if they were to write a mild and temperate article suggesting that a man cannot become a woman. Now this is what Micaiah had to endure.

[45 : 26] Look again at verse 13, where the king's messenger presses him. The messenger says, look, the words of the prophets 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, if you don't go along with the majority, you are done for. Micaiah knew that, but he wasn't going to be shifted. He says very simply, as the Lord lives, what the Lord says to me, that I will speak.

He's aware of the pressure of the truth upon him, God's truth, and that's why he stands firm. Now the message for us today is surely very clear.

I love being part of this church. I rejoice at the present day fruitfulness of this congregation. The Lord's blessing is upon us in many ways. But, if useful gospel work is to continue in this church for years to come, we need to develop a determination in our hearts to hold tenaciously to the truth of the Bible in the face of the world's onslaught.

We need to take this to heart as individuals. If you are to be a useful and fruitful Christian ten years from now, twenty years from now, you need to decide to be a man or a woman who will not shift from the Bible.

[46 : 49] If you're not willing to be decisive like that, you will probably drift away into a church that professes to follow the Bible but actually embraces the ideologies of the modern world because it doesn't want to be unpopular.

friends, think often of Micaiah. He's long dead but his example speaks to us with power.

Let's pray.