



Speaking God's Truth without Compromise

Martin Luther once said: If I witness for every portion of the truth, except the one little portion that the devil is attacking at the moment, I am not confessing Christ, however loudly I may be professing Him. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved. It is easy for a minister of the Gospel to defend doctrines no one is attacking. If Luther had spent his life defending the doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ, no one would have bothered him, because no one in the Church at the time questioned this doctrine.

Why did Luther get into trouble with "Mother Church?" Because he boldly proclaimed the doctrine of justification by faith alone. By going against the "salvation by works" teaching of his day he brought upon himself the wrath and displeasure of Christendom. A true prophet is a man who must often swim against the tide. He does not solicit the praise of man, but seeks the approval of God. Therefore he will often be misunderstood, misrepresented, and mistreated.

The Prophet Micaiah

In 1 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 18 we meet such a true prophet. His name is Micaiah the son of Imlah. Ahab, the king of Israel, has invited Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, to help him take back the city of Ramoth-Gilead from the Syrians. Before accepting this proposal, however, Jehoshaphat insists that Ahab first seek counsel with the Lord. Ahab agrees. He calls in his four hundred prophets. In response to Ahab's question as to whether he should go to war or not, the four hundred prophets answer unanimously that God approves of the planned action.

Jehoshaphat is not convinced, however. He suspects these men have not received their message from Jehovah. He insists that Ahab summon Micaiah, the one remaining prophet of the Lord in Samaria. Reluctantly, Ahab bows to his friend's wishes and sends for Micaiah, who is in prison.

Micaiah is Offered Unsolicited Advice

When the messenger has informed Micaiah why Ahab wants to see him, he gives him a few hints as to what he should tell the king. Since his colleagues have given Ahab a positive message he is urged to do the same. He must not embarrass the king in front of Jehoshaphat! This man probably thought he was doing Micaiah a favour. He assumes that Micaiah too, will appreciate hearing in advance in what direction the wind is blowing, so he can set his sails accordingly.

Many modern prophets are like that too. They wait to see what is "in" at a certain time, and then they gear their message to whatever people like to hear. In the sixties when the civil rights movement was in full swing, all "with it" clergymen jumped on the bandwagon. In the eighties it was feminism, in the nineties gay rights and today it is global warming that provides fodder for our politically correct prophets.

Ahab's four hundred prophets understood, that to stay popular and even alive, they had to tell Ahab what he wanted to hear. Micaiah therefore is put under tremendous pressure to adopt this same survival technique.

Micaiah's Resolve

What will Micaiah do? Cave in? No, he won't. Micaiah is a true prophet of the Lord. As difficult as it is for him to go against the prevailing mood, he knows he has to speak the truth. His reply is

unequivocal: *"As the Lord liveth, what the LORD saith unto me, that will I speak."* However, when Ahab asks him what he should do, go to war or not, the prophet's answer is surprising: *"Go up and prosper, and the LORD will give it into the hand of the king."* This is not what Ahab had expected to hear from Micaiah. Has the prophet changed his mind? No! Micaiah is being sarcastic. For a moment he assumes the role of one of Ahab's false prophets. You ask me whether you should go up against Ramoth-Gilead? Go right ahead. That is what you expect me to say, so I'll cooperate and tell you exactly what you want to hear.

Ahab recognizes the sarcasm behind Micaiah's words and insists that the prophet will speak only the truth in the name of the Lord. How hypocritical this is! But Micaiah takes him at his word. He will give him the truth and nothing but the truth.

The Mystery of a Lying Spirit

Micaiah has seen a vision. In this vision all Israel lies scattered on the hills as sheep without a shepherd and the voice of the Lord says: *"These have no master, let them return every man to his house in peace."* The meaning is clear. If you, Ahab, go to battle, you will pay for it with your life – you will be killed. Ahab doesn't like this message either. Leaning over to Jehoshaphat, he says: See, I told you so; that man can only prophesy evil to me.

But Micaiah goes on to explain where these four hundred prophets get their message and who inspired them. God has sent a lying spirit into these men. How must we interpret this? Did these prophets become false because of this spirit of deception, or were they false to begin with? The latter, no doubt. The prophets of Ahab's court are evil men. They claim to be prophets of the Lord, while in reality they speak only from their own heart. Now God, by way of judgment, sends them an evil spirit to deceive them, so that they cannot do anything but prophesy lies. How terrible this is! Not only for these prophets themselves, but also for those who listen to them and believe them.

According to the apostle Paul, there will come a time when the world will be full of such false prophets, and many will believe them. Yes, the whole world will follow them! Why? Because God shall send them a spirit of strong delusion (cf. 2 Thess.2:11). I believe we are living in those days already. Isn't our world full of false prophets and don't the masses follow them? Who still wants to hear pure Gospel preaching today? Yes, there are still churches where the truth is preached, thank God. But the trend is away from clear and faithful Biblical preaching whereby sinners are warned to flee from the wrath to come and called to "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21).

Sound Doctrine is Hated

Why is this so? Let the apostle Paul explain the reason. In 2 Timothy 4:3 he says: *"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth."* So the fault lies with both preachers and hearers. The four hundred prophets would not have been invited to Ahab's court if the king had listened to the truth proclaimed by Elijah and Micaiah. But Ahab's ears had become itchy and he couldn't stand the truth any more. *"Hast thou found me, O mine enemy,"* he spits out when Elijah comes to rebuke him for his sins. His complaint about Micaiah is that he only prophesied unpleasant things to him.

Yet, both Elijah and Micaiah meant well. Both sought after Ahab's conversion, not his destruction. But Ahab will not listen. Ahab wants to go on sinning and he tries to comfort himself with the messages of his false prophets. How sad! These prophets are keeping the truth from him. This is God's judgment upon Ahab and this is still God's judgment on sinners today who turn away from the truth. God lets them go. He allows them to be deceived by religious leaders who speak in the name of the Lord, but in reality they are led by the spirit of deception.

Micaiah, the true prophet of the Lord, delivers an unwelcome message to king Ahab and his guest, Jehoshaphat. The false prophets promise that Ahab's war effort will be a smashing success, but

Micaiah warns him that it will be a colossal failure. Unpopular as this prediction makes him, Micaiah is resolved to speak the truth and only the truth: "As the LORD liveth, what the LORD saith unto me, that will I speak." Here we see loyalty to divine truth in the face of tremendous pressure. The pressure he faces is three-fold.

The Pressure of Humanism

There is, first of all, the pressure of humanism. To Ahab, religion is something he uses for his own advantage. Like Pilate later, he is not interested in truth. Ahab is a man of the world. Since religion is a fact of life, he will use it to promote his own interests. The four hundred prophets he retains at his court provide the official sanction of religion to his autocratic policies.

Our society, to the extent that it still sees a role for religion, allows it to perform only social functions. It totally rejects the vertical, but still recognizes the horizontal dimension of faith. The church may provide material relief to the poor and needy but she should not impose biblical norms and values on people. Not God, but man must decide what is good and bad, right and wrong.

Micaiah knows that he is expected to dance to Ahab's humanistic tune, but by God's grace, he resists this pressure. Evangelical ministers as well as conscientious church members often find themselves faced with similar pressures. Those who dare to condemn public sins in the name of God and His revealed truth are being charged with hate crimes and prosecuted as violators of man-made laws.

The Pressure of Compromise

Another pressure that was brought to bear on Micaiah was that of compromise. We see this spirit of compromise at work in king Jehoshaphat. Just as Ahab is the father of all who want to hear nothing but smooth things, so Jehoshaphat is the type of believer who compromises with the truth. At heart, Jehoshaphat is a good man. He is described as a God-fearing king. Yet he reveals himself as a man prepared to sacrifice principle for the sake of good relations with Ahab.

How often we are like that too! We don't want to be different from the world. We don't dare say no to the Ahabs of the world and we resent it when God's faithful servants rebuke us for this sin. Jehoshaphat follows Ahab to Ramoth-Gilead despite Micaiah's clear warning that God's blessing does no rest upon the venture.

The Pressure of Majority Opinion

Micaiah also has to resist the pressure of majority opinion. He is faced with the demand to bring his message in line with that of his colleagues. Ahab's prophets claim to speak for Jehovah. Actually, they are inspired by a lying spirit and they utter lies in the name of the Lord. The most subtle danger of Ahab's day was not the golden calves set up by Jeroboam, but the men who claimed to speak for the true God and had become so blinded that they could not discern truth from error.

Also in our time there are blind leaders of the blind who speak for the Lord, but they were never sent by Him. Denying even the possibility of objective and absolute truth, they teach that truth is relative, depending on the individual and his needs and that of society's needs. We are being told from every side that the Bible is not the only source of truth and that there are many ways to God.

But the Bible says there is only one way of salvation, namely through Christ and Him crucified and risen. Micaiah resisted the pressure of Ahab's humanism. He resisted the pressure of Jehoshaphat's compromising. He resisted the pressure of four hundred false prophets to tone down unpleasant and embarrassing truth. He suffered persecution and his only reward for being loyal to God's truth was that Ahab threw him back into prison and put him on starvation rations.

It would have been so easy for Micaiah to avoid all this. If he had only given in a little and tweaked his message just a bit, he might have been set free. He could have said, I need to use some tact here, then I may go out and preach again and win souls for the Lord. But Micaiah said nothing of

the sort. Instead, he said: *“As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak.”* Micaiah was willing to suffer persecution for God's sake and for the truth's sake. Are we prepared to do this? Are we willing to stand up and be counted today when the masses are departing from the truth?

Faithfulness is Vindicated

The Elijahs and Micaiahs, the Peters, Pauls and Calvins and Luthers, and all God's faithful people go through many afflictions in this life. But their end is peace. Micaiah was ultimately vindicated. His prophecy came true. Ahab was killed and Jehoshaphat had a narrow escape. God's Word never lies. What it says always comes to pass. That is true of His warnings as well as His promises.

As we begin another season of regular church activities after our summer vacation, we need to keep all these things in mind. May we as ministers and others who are involved in teaching Sunday school, catechism classes, Bible studies and evangelistic outreach, follow Micaiah's example and speak only what the Lord says to us, while practicing what we preach and teach, by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. Let us never forget what our exalted Lord said to the church of Ephesus: *“Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”*

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