

**1 Kings 22:1-28 (1984 NIV)**  
***Dare To Speak God's Truth***

**Introduction**

The story is told of a famine in a certain place. People were anxious and frustrated as they looked at the sky for any sign of relief. But no rain came after many weeks.

The pastor of a local church called for a time of prayer the following Sunday. He asked the people to come on that day and each to bring an object of faith as an inspiration. That day came and many were in church, praying with hopeful hearts. The pastor was touched to see the variety of objects held in prayerful hands—Bibles, crosses, prayer books, etc.

When the prayer time ended, a little rain fell on the land. The people cheered wildly, holding up high in praise and gratitude all the objects that they brought with them. From the middle of the crowd, one object stood out high and above all the others as far as faith and belief symbolism is concerned—it was an umbrella held up high in the hand of a little child. Yes, his action did not contradict his faith and belief.

Indeed, we can act in ways that contradict our declaration of faith and belief—i.e. we can act in disobedience even though we may declare that we want to obey God.

This is exactly what we see in our text today—1 Kgs. 22:1-28. We see how the acts of Jehoshaphat (king of Judah) and Ahab (king of Israel) contradicted their declaration of wanting to do things in God's ways. Both sought the counsel of the Lord, but when it finally came through the prophecy of a man named Micaiah, both kings chose to disobey it.

And for the prophet Micaiah who declared that he would only tell “what the Lord tells me” in 1 Kgs. 22:14, it would seem that it didn't pay to speak God's truth. You could say truth-telling seemed to be one big mistake for him; one big waste of time and effort. He failed to get both kings to heed his prophecy. Even worse, he was sent into imprisonment for what he said to the kings.

As Christians, we need to learn to be both real and relevant in our relationships with others. And to be real and relevant, there may be times when we need to speak the hard truth against an act, but in real love for the person. This is always a challenge many of us would rather avoid than to face. Our text today shows us that there are at least two reasons why this is so.

The first reason is because ...

**I. Other people may have already made up their mind not to heed (vv. 1-12).**

Let's first look at vv. 1-3.

1 For three years there was no war between Aram and Israel. 2 But in the third year Jehoshaphat king of Judah went down to see the king of Israel. 3 The king of Israel had said to his officials, "Don't you know that Ramoth Gilead belongs to us and yet we are doing nothing to retake it from the king of Aram?"

We see here how the alliance between Jehoshaphat and Ahab helped both these kings to run their own agenda. These were the years of the divided kingdom—Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Ahab, King of Israel, sought help from Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, to recapture Ramoth Gilead from the Syrians. Ahab had waited for three years for the Syrian King to make good his promise of returning Ramoth Gilead to Israel, but nothing happened. So, Ahab asked Jehoshaphat to help him in retaking this city.

Both kings were allied by marriage (2 Chr. 18:1). Jehoshaphat's son, Jehoram, had married Ahab's daughter, Athaliah. Both kings were actually using this alliance to strengthen their own military position and advance their own political ambition. Each was using the other to run his own agenda—they calculated and reckoned that their combined forces would stand a good chance of defeating the Syrians and retaking Ramoth Gilead, thereby raising their own military and political profile.

So, both kings had their mind made up—Ahab wanted to fight, and Jehoshaphat agreed to fight with him. But notice what was said about them in vv. 4-9.

4 So he asked Jehoshaphat, "Will you go with me to fight against Ramoth Gilead?" Jehoshaphat replied to the king of Israel, "I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses." 5 But Jehoshaphat also said to the king of Israel, "First seek the counsel of the Lord." 6 So the king of Israel brought together the prophets—about four hundred men and asked them, "Shall I go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain?" "Go," they answered, "for the Lord will give it into the king's hand." 7 But Jehoshaphat asked, "Is there not a prophet of the Lord here whom we can inquire of?" 8 The king of Israel answered Jehoshaphat, "There is still one man through whom we can inquire of the Lord, but I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad. He is Micaiah son of Imlah." "The king should not say that," Jehoshaphat replied. 9 So the king of Israel called one of his officials and said, "Bring Micaiah son of Imlah at once."

Jehoshaphat had made up his mind to fight alongside Ahab, but he wanted a word from God before proceeding. He had made up his mind; all he wanted was an endorsement from God, perhaps to ease his own conscience. "Lord, I

have made up my mind to fight with Ahab. We have a good chance of winning this fight. And then it would be good for everyone—me, Ahab, and even for you. This is what I have intended to do. Now, just endorse it through the mouth of someone so that I don't have to feel bad about this."

Of course, Ahab had all kinds of prophets at his disposals. Though he had earlier lost 450 of these prophets on Mt. Carmel to the prophet Elijah, he could still muster about 400 more at this point in time. All of these 400 prophets said that the Lord would give victory to Ahab and Jehoshaphat.

In spite of the unanimous opinion of these prophets, Jehoshaphat remained unimpressed. He had enough discernment to see that these were "corrupted" prophets who only claimed to speak God's word. So, he asked for a second opinion—not because he wanted to obey God, but he wanted his plan to be endorsed validly by a prophet of "good standing". He had actually made up his mind.

In reply, Ahab reluctantly revealed that there was still a prophet yet to be summoned—his name was Micaiah. But Ahab made no bones about hating Micaiah—this prophet always said nothing good about his king. Ahab wanted to fight and retake Ramoth Gilead for he believed the time was absolutely right for him to move and claim glory for his own kingship. So, he didn't want to hear anything that would sound contrary to his own military and political dreams. He didn't want to hear from Micaiah; his mind had already made up—that was why he was reluctant to summon up Micaiah.

Two situations are still very real to us today:

- One, we want God to endorse what we have already decided. We can even deceive ourselves to think that we are seeking God's mind, but in reality, we have already made up our mind. Indeed, God must say "yes" to us because we accept no other answers from Him.
- Two, we refuse even to give anyone else a hearing. We deceive ourselves by taking our stubborn-mindedness as single-mindedness. We refuse to give heed to godly counsel, or even to the very Word of God. We have made up our mind, and nothing must ever change that.

As you and I examine ourselves, are we in such situations? Let's seek the Lord to help us so that our mind would not be so fixed and our ears so closed that we become immovable and deaf even to the counsel of God Himself.

And for those who try to counsel others with the hard truth of God, they often realise that there is one cold reality in life—i.e. the easy way is often to speak what people WANT to hear, not what they NEED to hear from God (vv. 10-12).

10 Dressed in their royal robes, the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah were sitting on their thrones at the threshing floor by the entrance of the gate of Samaria, with all the prophets prophesying before them. 11 Now Zedekiah son of Kenaanah had made iron horns and he

declared, "This is what the Lord says: 'With these you will gore the Arameans until they are destroyed.'" 12 All the other prophets were prophesying the same thing. "Attack Ramoth Gilead and be victorious," they said, "for the Lord will give it into the king's hand."

Imagine 400 prophets saying to Ahab, "Go up against the king of Syria!" One of them was especially dramatic. His name was Zedekiah and he ran around with iron horns, pushing at everyone with these horns and saying, "This is the way you are going to do it and win the war!"

What a scene! Two kings on their thrones and with 400 prophets crying out, "Go and fight! Victory is sure!" I can imagine Ahab nodding his head in approval and smiling at Jehoshaphat, saying, "Ah! That's what it should be. We go, we fight, and we win ... because the Lord says so!"

In such a positive setting, it seems almost sacrilegious for anyone to upset it with any negative words. That's why truth-telling can be so unbearable, unwelcome, intrusive, offensive, and difficult to exercise. It is like shattering someone's beautiful world with a cruel act of sabotage by speaking the truth, never mind that beautiful world is not reality but an illusion.

However, if we are to be real and relevant in our relationships with people, there may be times when the kindest thing that we can do is to bring someone out of his/her fantasy and into reality by speaking the truth in love. Indeed, learning to tell the truth in love is the basis of real and relevant relationships.

We may not deny the biblical basis for telling the truth in love. We may agree in theory that honesty is a biblical policy, even if it may not always be the "best" policy. But in practice, we have many excuses for not exercising truth-telling.

- "If I tell my boss the truth, my position in the company will be jeopardised."
- "If I tell my husband/wife the truth, he/she may think I'm trying to blame/nag."
- "If I tell my father/mother the truth, he/she may think I have no respect for him/her."
- "If I tell the pastor the truth, he may think that I am not supportive of his ministry."

Yes, truth-telling can make us vulnerable and be misunderstood, even if we tell it with the best of intention. Yes, truth can hurt. Thus, the natural tendency is to suppress the feelings, suppress the truth, ignore the issues, put on denial mode, back off, mind own business, and keep the peace. Unfortunately, this mind-set often fails to nurture real and relevant relationships. I suspect many relationships are destroyed because people refuse to take the risk of being real and relevant to one another; to speak the truth in love to one another until it is too late to say anything at all.

Not only the world, but also the church today needs people to be willing to engage in speaking the truth in love from time to time so that relationships can

move from the superficial to a deeper and authentic level. A church where people engage in real and relevant relationships will grow to be a true community of God's people where people are willing to do all things to one another in a spirit of trust and love. This is a community where God's redemptive love, grace, and mercy are exercised and received as people relate to one another.

Indeed, speaking the truth, especially truth in accordance to what God wants us to tell, has a needful and rightful place in human relationships. But I will not be telling the truth if I tell you that truth-speaking is easy. It is not, and that's why many people avoid it altogether until perhaps it is too late to say anything at all.

Truth-telling is not easy, and one reason why we avoid it is because other people may have already made up their mind not to heed. There is a second reason and it is because ...

## **II. We may be a lone voice (vv. 13-28).**

Verses 13-18:

13 The messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah said to him, "Look, as one man the other prophets are predicting success for the king. Let your word agree with theirs, and speak favorably." 14 But Micaiah said, "As surely as the Lord lives, I can tell him only what the Lord tells me." 15 When he arrived, the king asked him, "Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain?" "Attack and be victorious," he answered, "for the Lord will give it into the king's hand." 16 The king said to him, "How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?" 17 Then Micaiah answered, "I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and the Lord said, 'These people have no master. Let each one go home in peace.'" 18 The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Didn't I tell you that he never prophesies anything good about me, but only bad?"

Note what Micaiah says in v. 14—"As surely as the Lord lives, I can tell him only what the Lord tells me." There is a sure measure of devotion to God in what Micaiah says here. Indeed, truth-telling demands that we first be true to God.

The messenger of Ahab advised Micaiah to agree with what the other prophets were saying. But Micaiah replied that he could only agree with what the Lord wanted him to say. In choosing this, he became alienated from the others, BUT not from God. The messenger was only trying to help him regain the favour of the king—"Look, Micaiah. The best way to win friends and influence them is to stay on their good side. So, act smart—say what the king wants to hear and stay on his good side."

When Micaiah came before Ahab, notice how he initially played along with the crowd in v. 15. When asked by Ahab, he told the king to attack and claim victory—he sarcastically agreed with the other prophets.

But Ahab was not to be fooled. He demanded that Micaiah spoke the truth. This time, Micaiah shared a vision of Israel being scattered like sheep without a shepherd; a people with no master (v. 17). “No shepherd and no master” either means Ahab was no leader or he was going to be no more (i.e. to be killed soon). In either case, it was not complimentary to the ego of Ahab.

Note the stubbornness of Ahab here. He had pressed Micaiah for the truth, but when it was finally told to him, he refused to accept it. He had made up his mind not to listen, even to God through His prophet (v. 18).

Micaiah went on to say these words to Ahab in vv. 19-23:

19 Micaiah continued, "Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne with all the host of heaven standing around him on his right and on his left. 20 And the Lord said, 'Who will entice Ahab into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there?' One suggested this, and another that. 21 Finally, a spirit came forward, stood before the Lord and said, 'I will entice him.' 22 'By what means?' the Lord asked. 'I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets,' he said. 'You will succeed in enticing him,' said the Lord. 'Go and do it.' 23 So now the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours. The Lord has decreed disaster for you."

One theological issue here has to do with this question—does the God of truth go round using people to tell lies in order to bring about His good purpose? I do not intend to go into any theological debate, except to say three things:

- One, Micaiah's account of the lying spirit was a denunciation of the 400 prophets of Ahab—that they were not the true prophets of God.
- Two, this lying spirit in the mouths of the prophets was made known to Ahab even before he went to battle and got himself killed. In other words, he was warned by Micaiah that a lying spirit would be speaking to him through the prophets. Yet Ahab chose to be deceived by listening to these 400 prophets through whom the lying spirit spoke.
- Three, God is sovereign and so nothing operates beyond His control. He can even allow evil to act and use it to bring about His good purpose—e.g. God allowed evil men to crucify Jesus so that His redemptive purpose for the world could be completed by Jesus.

So, Micaiah denounced all of Ahab's 400 prophets as a bunch of liars. All 400 of them saying the same thing, yet not one of them was telling the truth of God.

What does this mean for us today?

- One, the majority could be wrong. But we are often tempted to say, “If so many people are doing/saying the same thing, then it must be the right thing to do/say.” The influence of the crowd can be very powerful—even a reasoning mind can be powerless in the face of this pressure.
- Two, the crowd may be intimidating and even convincing. So, we need to critically develop personal convictions in areas such as lifestyle, speech, and thinking to help us resist the pressure to conform. We need to speak up and let our convictions be known so that others can know where we stand on certain issues. We need to be consistent in living out our convictions before others if we want them to take us seriously, and even to be positively influenced by us. We need to know when to run when we cannot resist bad influences. You and I are not cowards when we flee from temptation. In fact, this may be the wisest and bravest thing you and I can do at that moment of temptation.
- Three, we need Christian fellowship because it is our way of influencing and “pressurising” one another for truth and righteousness. When we gather and fellowship together, it is not a time to think as the world thinks, but to test how the world thinks against the measure of God's truth and righteousness. We don't uncritically accept the thinking and values of the world. Instead, we ask deep-searching questions like:
  - Are these ideas and actions consistent with what the Bible teaches?
  - How are we living with what we have or what we don't have as witnesses for the Lord before the world?
  - Are we still our true self in Christ when we are with the crowd out there, or do we prefer to behave in a way that will make the crowd accept us as just like them?

The messenger of Ahab advised Micaiah to follow the crowd—to say what they were saying, so that he could find favour and acceptance before the king and the prophetic crowd. But Micaiah chose to tell only what the Lord wanted him to say. He would rather sought the Lord's approval and acceptance than that of Ahab and the prophetic crowd.

As God's people, we today have been accepted by God in Jesus Christ. There's no higher/better acceptance than this, not even that of the crowd in this world. So, let's make and keep our stand for God today. Of course, this does not mean we go round and deliberately making enemies with the crowd. But what it means is that when we make and keep our stand for God before the crowd, we ultimately seek our approval and vindication from God Himself.

Verses 24-28 reminds us of this:

24 Then Zedekiah son of Kenaanah went up and slapped Micaiah in the face. "Which way did the spirit from the Lord go when he went from me to speak to you?" he asked. 25 Micaiah replied, "You will find out on the day you go to hide in an inner room." 26 The king of Israel then ordered, "Take Micaiah and send him back to Amon the ruler of the city and to Joash the king's son 27 and say, 'This is what the king says: Put this fellow in prison and give him nothing but bread and water until I return

safely." 28 Micaiah declared, "If you ever return safely, the Lord has not spoken through me." Then he added, "Mark my words, all you people!"

Micaiah's words of truth had angered the king and Zedekiah, the leader of the 400 prophets. And as he was being dragged into prison, Micaiah warned Ahab one last time in v. 28—"If you ever return safely, the Lord has not spoken through me. Mark my words, all you people!" But again, Ahab would not listen. At that point, he was fully responsible for his own stubborn mindedness; he had made up his mind.

In the face of much hostility, Micaiah told Ahab that he would not return alive but be killed in battle. Micaiah could utter these words bravely because he looked only to the Lord's approval and vindication of him. And he was proven true and right in the end.

Our story today is not really about pitting true prophecy against false prophecy. Rather, the focal thrust has to do with God's sovereignty—He is in sovereign control. God will be faithful to those who speak and obey His words of truth. Conversely, those who choose to speak falsehood and disobey His words of truth will suffer His disapproval in the end. This gives us the confidence to press on and speak truthfully for God; to speak what He wants us to tell others with conviction and without compromise. Yes, if we stand by the Lord' sovereign control and power, we can endure to the end, even if we may seem like a lone voice in a hostile world.

## Conclusion

We are exhorted today to be truth-telling people in God's love, grace, and mercy. But this is often challenging because:

- People may have already made up their mind and not heed our words.
- We may be a lone voice.

I like to close with three thoughts for us to think about:

- One, silence is not golden if it only promotes our popularity, but not propagate what is right to God. So, let's learn to speak the truth ... and do it in love, grace, and mercy.
- Two, the church would be doing its members a great disfavoured if it only tells them what they want to hear, and what they need to hear from God. Ahab only liked to hear the falsehood that he wanted to hear. He hated the truth that he actually needed to hear. There are religious assertions that only promise "cheap grace"—i.e. we are promised all the best things from God with no strings attached. But the truth of God's Word and His amazing grace do exhort us to bear the good fruit of righteousness even as we enjoy the blessings of God for us. Yes, the truth of God's Word does at times cause us discomfort, especially when what we have accepted or decided in our mind is being corrected or challenged. But it is precisely at such times that we need to hear and heed God's truth.

- Three, congregational participation means being responsible in seeking the Lord's mind individually and corporately. We in this Baptist church arrive at major decisions based on majority votes. Today, we learn that the majority may not be always right. I am not saying that we are misled by a lying spirit, or we do away with the voting practice. Rather, I am exhorting all of us to be responsible members by making serious efforts to seek the Lord's mind whenever there are major decisions to be taken by the church. Pray about these, talk about these, vote on these with conviction not convenience, and commit to follow through the decisions that have been voted for.

Let's seek the Lord to so help us dare to speak His truth and do His will in a world that is often tempting us to speak and do otherwise.

Amen!