

Faithful Suffering and Vindication of the Prophet

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[0:00] So our reading tonight is in the second book of Chronicles, page 450 in the Church Bibles. We're starting at chapter 18, verse 23, and we're continuing and taking in the first three verses of chapter 19.

! So it's 2 Chronicles 18, verse 23. Then Zedekiah, son of Canaan, 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. Micaiah replied, you will find out on the day you go to hide in an inner room.

The king of Israel then ordered, take Micaiah and send him back to Ammon, the ruler of the city, and to Joash the king's son 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. Micaiah declared, if you ever return safely, the Lord has not spoken through me.

[1:10] Then he added, mark my words, all you people. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, went up to Ramoth-Gilead.

The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, I will enter the battle in disguise, but you wear your royal robes. So the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle.

Now the king of Aram had ordered his chariot commanders, do not fight with anyone, small or great, except the king of Israel.

When the chariot commanders saw Jehoshaphat, they thought, this is the king of Israel. So they turned to attack him. But Jehoshaphat cried out, and the Lord helped him.

God drew them away from him. For when the chariot commanders saw that he was not the king of Israel, they stopped pursuing him. But someone drew his bow at Ramdon and hit the king of Israel between the sections of his armor.

[2:15] The king told the chariot driver, wheel around and get me out of the fighting. I've been wounded. All day long the battle ranged, and the king of Israel propped himself up in his chariot, facing the Arameans until evening.

Then at sunset he died. When Jehoshaphat king of Judah returned safely to his palace in Jerusalem, Jehu the seer, the son of Hanani, went out to meet him, and said to the king, Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord?

Because of this, the wrath of the Lord is upon you. There is, however, some good in you, for you have rid the land of the Asherah poles, and have set your heart on seeking God.

And may the Lord add his blessing to the reading of his word. Let's pray as we sit.

May the words of my lips and the meditations of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

[3:26] Amen. Good evening. Thanks very much, Jack, for reading. It's worth perhaps clarifying that Jehu here is the son of Hanani.

That's not the Jehu who is famous for aggressive driving. My Aunt Kay would refer to drivers as driving like Jehu on the basis of 2 Kings, chapter 9, verse 20, where it says, The driving is like the driving of Jehu, the son of Nimshi, for he driveth furiously.

So, not that Jehu, a different one. But back to the point. We come to the third and final sermon on Micaiah, the forgotten prophet.

And before I give you a summary of the first part of the chapter, I'm going to take a little, just one initial thought, which is that one way in which we might identify with Micaiah is that his message is completely disregarded.

He gives God's word and it makes no difference at all. The only difference it makes when he tells God's word is that he gets into trouble.

[4:42] No one actually listens. And I think we can identify with that. It's hard to speak when no one will listen. Particularly hard to speak when you're right.

So, in case you've been somewhere exciting these last few weeks, if you've been in Disney World and not here, then here's a quick summary of the earlier part of the chapter, which has already been expounded to us.

We're in the period of the two kingdoms. Ahab is king of Israel, the northern kingdom, and Jehoshaphat is king of Judah, the southern kingdom.

Ahab is a particularly wicked king. His wife is Jezebel. She's the daughter of Ethbal. She's led him to worship Baal and make an ash for a pole.

That is to promote pagan worship. You may have heard of Ahab because of Elijah's opposition to him. Ahab is a king of Israel. Jehoshaphat, the southern king, is far from perfect, as we shall see, particularly in this chapter.

[5:57] But it does at least say, in the last verse of our passage, that he set his heart on seeking God. Two weeks ago, we discovered that King Ahab wants to go into battle against the king of Aram, and he's recruited King Jehoshaphat to help.

Jehoshaphat's already made a foolish marriage alliance with Ahab. Perhaps he was seeking the unity of God's people. And Jehoshaphat, although I said he's not perfect, at least he says, well, we need a prophet of the Lord to consult before we go into action.

So Ahab produces 400 prophets, all of whom say exactly the same thing, and all say, go. And Jehoshaphat says, but I want a prophet of the Lord.

And so a prophet is brought. Enter, at this point, Micaiah. I'm not going into details of the last two-week sermon, but Micaiah explains that the 400 prophets have received a deceiving spirit.

In 2 Chronicles 18 and verse 22, it says, So now the Lord has put a deceiving spirit in the mouths of these prophets of yours. The Lord has decreed disaster for you.

[7:28] Ahab is being enticed out to battle and to death. So that's when our passage starts.

Then Zedekiah, son of Canaanah, went up and slapped Micaiah in the face. Zedekiah's a powerful chap. He's part of the 400. Micaiah is on his own.

You can picture it. The 400 all say the same thing. And then there's our chap, Micaiah. What's more, Zedekiah had made iron horns.

And he's made a great visual aid. And he declared, This is what the Lord says. With these you will gore the Arameans until they are destroyed. He feels not, you know.

The person on the other side got a visual aid as well. He's really, poor Micaiah is in a difficult position. And then Zedekiah says to Micaiah, Which way did the spirit from the Lord go when he went for me to speak to you?

[8:39] You can just picture him saying it, can't you? That is, what he means is, I had the spirit of the Lord when I told you to go.

I told the king to go. And now it seems very surprising to me that the spirit went off and told you to do exactly the opposite. Now, I think we have to make some effort to get ourselves into this.

Because we all know that Micaiah is the good guy. So we all identify with him and we are well aware that the 400 and the visual aid are on the wrong side.

But Micaiah is under real pressure. The wicked are really pressing on him. But Micaiah holds firm under pressure.

He says, you'll find out on the day when you go to hide in an inner room. What he means by that is, the time is going to come when Ahab has been defeated and Zedekiah will know that Micaiah has told the truth when Zedekiah has to go and hide because it's all unraveled.

[9:58] So Micaiah is under strong pressure. He's suffering verbal abuse from Zedekiah.

And then the king orders, take Micaiah and send him back to Ammon, the ruler of the city, and to Joash, the king's son, 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.

Did you notice? Earlier in the story, he's always referred to as Micaiah, the son of Imla. Now he's just called this fellow. The king has no time for him.

It's also interesting, and I don't know why it's translated thus, that the bread and water are literally bread of oppression and water of oppression in the Hebrew.

It's the word used in Exodus chapter 3 of the oppression of the Israelites with which the Egyptians oppressed them. It's the word used by the psalmist in Psalms 42 and 43.

[11:06] Why do I go mourning? Because of the oppression of the enemy. Micaiah is being treated by a leader of God's people as Egypt treated Israel.

It's not right. He's being oppressed by a leader of God's people. But that's what happens to Micaiah. But Micaiah again is brave. He reiterates his conviction. Verse 27, Micaiah declared, If you ever return safely, the Lord has not spoken through me.

And then for that section, there's a surprising postscript. Micaiah's last words in the Bible are in 27b. Then he added, Mark my words, all you people.

Now these words are identical to the first words that the prophet Micaiah speaks in the book of Micaiah. That's in Micaiah chapter 1, verse 2.

[12:18] In Micaiah, the words, Mark my words, all you people, are spoken in the atmosphere of a law court. The nations are in the dock as much as Israel itself.

So here it seems that Micaiah is saying that he's made a proclamation to all people. His word has gone out to the nations round about as well.

And what has he proclaimed? He's proclaimed that the Lord is the Lord of history, the Lord of all. He's proclaimed that an abusive leader like Micaiah, like Ahab, will not prosper.

He will come under judgment. As Jonathan put it last week, there is a higher throne. That's what he's saying. Mark my words, all you people.

The Lord is king. And that's all we know about Micaiah. I'd love to be able to tell you that he was delivered from prison after Ahab's death, that he lived a happy old age on his pension.

[13:32] But we don't know. Maybe he died in prison. All we know about Micaiah is that he was a faithful prophet. He may have ended up like John the Baptist with his head cut off.

Or he may have ended up like the Apostle Paul who near the end of his life wrote to Timothy, this is my gospel for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal.

But God's word is not chained. And Micaiah's like that. He's chained in prison but with unchained words.

Mark my words, all you people. And there are many church leaders like that today in our world. People in many parts of the world who are suffering for the gospel.

We can't guarantee a good end for ourselves. Christopher Ashe in his commentary on Micaiah puts it like this, don't expect vindication in this age.

[14:44] For Micaiah, the end of the story is suffering. I'll come back to that though later. Let's go on. For most of our story tonight is about the battle.

So the king of Israel, it's funny how he loses his name after a while in the story. He's no longer called Ahab, he's just called the king of Israel. And Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, went up to Ramoth Gilead.

It's a bit strange. I mean, Ahab, the wicked, and Jehoshaphat, the godly, but disobedient, disregard Micaiah.

they go, despite the word of God through Micaiah. Jehoshaphat may have felt locked into the alliance that he'd already started with this unwise marriage.

He seems to be, in a sense, too nice. He bends over backwards to please Ahab. It's really extraordinary. But the funny thing is that Ahab thinks he's going to be able to hide from God.

[15:54] The kings of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, verse 29, I will enter the battle in disguise, but you wear your royal robes. I mean, what an extraordinary risk Jehoshaphat takes.

How foolish can you be but to say, oh, jolly good show, Ahab. I'll wear my royal robes. I mean, you know, it's really odd. Ahab seems to think that he can hide from God.

He can, you know, just disregard what Micaiah said. So the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle. We might think for a moment about the ways in which human beings have hid from God in the Bible.

Right at the very beginning, Adam and Eve tried it. after they ate the forbidden fruit, they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

But God calls them out. No success there. Or how about Saul when he went to the medium at Endor in 1 Samuel 28.

[17:02] So Saul disguised himself putting on other clothes and at night he and two men went to the woman. Consult a spirit for me, he said. Then the woman asked, whom shall I bring up for you?

Bring up Samuel, he said. When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out at the top of her voice and said to Saul, why have you deceived me? You are Saul.

Again, hiding didn't work there. Or my favorite example, I think, is in 1 Kings 14 when Jeroboam's wife goes to see the prophet Ahijah. She pretends to be someone else.

Now, we're told that Ahijah couldn't see. His sight was gone because of his age. But in verse 6 of 1 Kings 14, when Ahijah heard the sound of her footsteps at the door, he said, come in, wife of Jeroboam.

He didn't see, but he certainly knew hiding didn't work. It didn't work in the garden. It didn't work for Saul. It didn't work for Jeroboam's wife.

[18:05] And it doesn't work here. Verse 30, now the king of Aram had ordered his chariot commanders, do not fight with anyone, small or great, except the king of Israel.

Now, I guess we can assume that the king of Aram had a strategy, that the important thing was to kill the king of Israel. That way is the direct route to victory.

But on the other hand, God is in control. He is focused on Ahab too, disguised or not. Verse 31, when the chariot commanders saw Jehoshaphat, they thought, this is the king of Israel.

The very thing that Ahab had planned, foolish Jehoshaphat, got into. So they turned to attack him. But Jehoshaphat cried out, and the Lord helped him.

God even cares for his disobedient servant Jehoshaphat. Is Jehoshaphat's cry a prayer?

[19:08] I think it probably is. He cries out, and the Lord helped him. God drew them away from him, it says at the end of verse 31.

For when the chariot commanders saw that he was not the king of Israel, they stopped pursuing him. Let's look at the verb for a moment.

God drew them away from him. Just as Ahab had drawn Jehoshaphat to go up to Ramoth Gilead in verse 2 to get him into trouble, now God drew the chariot commanders away from him to make him safe.

It's the same verb in verse 2, translated urge, and translated draw in verse 31. God is in control God draws the chariot commanders away, and his servant is safe.

But, and this is the moment when all Ahab's attempts come to an end. Verse 33, someone drew his bow at random and hit the king of Israel between the breastplate and the scale armor.

[20:21] Archers are firing their bows, and one arrow ends up in a key place. It's described here as a random action. Innocent, I think.

There are various different ways this word can be translated. It's similar to the apparently random action that led the sleepless King Xerxes in Esther chapter 6 to have read to him a part of the Chronicles of Persia.

And when he has this bit, which is apparently selected at random, he discovers the so far unhonored good deeds of Mordecai.

And the whole story comes to pass because of something, again, apparently random, but actually all part of the purposes of God. So the arrow hits Ahab.

The king told the chariot driver, wheel around and get me out of the fighting. I've been wounded. All day long the battle raged and the king of Israel propped himself up in his chariot facing the Arameans until evening.

[21:30] And then at sunset he died. And as far as Chronicles is concerned, that's it. As I said, in our whole chapter he's only named Ahab once.

Jehoshaphat is perhaps his chief concern and we'll come back to him. But there's more detail in 1 Kings 22 and I'm going to read verses 36 to 38. As the sun was setting, a cry spread through the army, every man to his town, every man to his land.

So the king died and was brought to Samaria and they buried him there. They washed the chariot at a pool in Samaria where the prostitutes bathed and the dogs licked up his blood as the word of the Lord had declared.

So here we have a more detailed conclusion to Ahab's story. We see how Micaiah's words in last week's passage had come true. Last week we heard that Micaiah answered that 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. And indeed, they do. What's more, what Ahab says has been told by Micaiah about himself has also come true.

[22:55] In fact, Elijah's words to Ahab in 1 Kings 21 that in the place where dogs licked up Naboth's blood, dogs will lick up your blood come true also.

We've thought earlier about Micaiah's suffering. We now see how he's vindicated. We don't know how his own life ended, but we do know that what he said came true and God vindicated his faithful prophet.

Faithful suffering and vindication are above all seen in the Lord Jesus. He's the one whose face gets slapped.

He's the one who suffered on the cross for our redemption and was wonderfully vindicated on the third day. And so will we be if we know and serve him.

There may be suffering as there was for Micaiah, but there will be vindication and the vindication of God's servants is Micaiah's message to us all.

[24:08] Mark my words, all you people. Now most of us will not face what Micaiah faced, although some may. We may find ourselves as the one Christian in our office.

I don't know whether there will be 400 on the other side. We could feel very alone. Some of us may face battles at work over giving priority to Sunday worship over some work thing that our bosses think would be important and we end up digging our heels in and being unpopular for it.

Of course, as some of our congregation know very well, there are much greater ways in which they have suffered for Jesus. Whatever suffering we face, the story of Micaiah reminds us that faithfulness leads to vindication.

but our story has one more bit. There's a postscript that went on to Jehoshaphat.

Now, if you've only read tonight's passage, you won't think much of Jehoshaphat. Yet, I think the chronicler sees him as a good and great king.

[25:32] He says so in chapters 17 and 20 and then in chapters 17 and most of 19 and 20 he gives examples of Jehoshaphat's good points.

But in our chapter, he behaves very poorly. He cozies up with Ahab through marriage alliance and war and then despite what Micaiah says, he just goes and does the wrong thing.

So, chapter 19 verse 1. When Jehoshaphat king of Judah returned safely to his palace in Jerusalem, Jehu the seer the son of Hanani went out to meet him and said to the king, Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord?

Because of this the wrath of the Lord is upon you. That's a pretty powerful response. Jehoshaphat can't say no.

He's too keen to please. He does what is wrong because someone else suggests it and he goes along with it. And Jehoshaphat's a warning to us.

[26:47] We can we all know something of Jehoshaphat in us because here's a man who's godly. We know that.

We know that he's set his heart on seeking God but he's gone right off course. And we need to watch out for that happening to ourselves.

But the story of Jehoshaphat can also encourage us whereas Ahab dies Jehoshaphat God's servant comes home in safety literally in peace.

God looks after his imperfect servant and after his rebuke by Jehu he goes on to lead his people and you can read the next chapters you'll find how he appoints judges and we come to his famous prayer.

We come to things that are good about him. But let's not end on Jehoshaphat with all the questions surrounding him. Let's go back to Micaiah again as we end because Micaiah exemplifies faithfulness.

[28:02] He's the wonderful example to us. The challenge to be like Micaiah and then if we do that we shall know God's vindication as Micaiah knew.

Let's pray as we sit. Heavenly Father thank you so much for Micaiah. Thank you that we've had these three weeks to look at this unknown servant of yours.

This servant who was faithful despite the pressure of 400 prophets despite the pressure of the king who was willing to be thrown into prison to be faithful to you.

And we ask that you'll make us faithful at work and in our lives. for we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.