

“Micaiah: Tell Them What They Want To Hear”

I once saw a film in which the actor Richard Benjamin played a young stockbroker. Bored with his job, he drifts into some lustful pursuits. There’s a scene in the stockbroker’s office. He’s talking on the phone with a client – and as I recall, he’s arguing with the client. Afterwards he talks to an older stockbroker in the same office about the incident. The older man advises: “Tell them what they want to hear.”

“Tell them what they want to hear”! This phrase sets the mood for today’s message in this series where we’re looking at some Old Testament personalities. The main character today is a little known prophet named **Micaiah**. The story is related in 1 Kings 22 (and also in 2 Chronicles 18). It takes place when Ahab is king in the northern kingdom Israel. Remember Ahab? His wife Jezebel was the one who threatened to kill the prophet Elijah. Ahab was a rather godless and ruthless ruler of Israel. King Ahab of Israel asks King Jehoshaphat, king of the southern kingdom Judah, to join him in trying to recapture an area known as Ramoth Gilead. King Jehoshaphat answers: “OK, we’re with you!” *But.....*”Inquire first for the word of the Lord” (1 Kings 22:5).

So King Ahab brings in a group of “official state prophets”, about 400 hundred of them, and consults with them. They all agree and say the Lord will give the king a victory. “Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred of them, and said to them, ‘Shall I go to battle against Ramoth-gilead, or shall I refrain?’ They said, ‘Go up, for the Lord will give it into the hand of the king’” (1 Kings 22:6). One prophet even throws in a little flair of show biz! “Zedekiah, son of Chenaanah made for himself horns of iron, and he said, ‘Thus says the Lord: With these you shall gore the Arameans until they are destroyed’” (verse 11). Prophets often acted out symbolically what their message was, but this guy’s theatrics seems a bit forced!

Actually, King Ahab has already made up his mind. He’s just hoping God will approve his decision! But King Jehoshaphat sees through the too-easy solidarity. Look at verse 7: “But Jehoshaphat said, ‘Is there no other prophet of the Lord here of whom we may inquire?’ Look at what Ahab answers! “The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, ‘There is still one other by whom we may inquire of the Lord, Micaiah son of Imlah; but I hate him, for he never prophecies anything favorable about me, but only disaster’” (verse 8). You gotta love it!

King Jehoshaphat scolds his royal colleague: “You shouldn’t say that!” (verse 8b). “Ok,” Ahab sighs. “Call in Micaiah right away” (verse 9). So a messenger goes to get the prophet Micaiah, and on the way the messenger gives him a little advice: “The messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah said to him, ‘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’” (verse 13). Play it straight, dude! Don’t rock the boat! Well, Micaiah looks him straight in the face and says, “As the Lord lives, whatever the Lord says to me, that will I speak” (verse 14).

When Micaiah is brought in to the two kings, he’s asked the same question the other prophets were asked, “Shall we attack Ramoth Gilead or not?” At first Micaiah seems to *mimic and copy* the other prophets, “Yeah, go ahead, God will give you victory!” (Imagine, mocking and toying with a king who has the power of life and death over you)! But Ahab senses that Micaiah is just

taunting the other prophets: “How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?” he says (verse 16). Then Micaiah reveals the *real* message from the Lord: “Then Micaiah said, ‘I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep that have no shepherd; and the Lord said, ‘They have no master; let each one go home in peace’” (verse 17). I just love the next verse, verse 18: “The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, ‘Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy anything favorable about me, but only disaster?’” Ahab, visibly upset, blurts out: “Didn’t I tell you he always says bad stuff about me when he prophesies!” The prophet Micaiah goes on to tell of a vision he had, how a lying spirit had been placed in the mouths of the other prophets. He clinches his message by saying to Ahab: “The Lord has decreed disaster for you” (verse 23b).

By now King Ahab has had enough: “Get this guy out of here. Put him in prison and don’t give him anything but bread and water till I get back from battle.” Micaiah has one last word and points to the real test for truth: “Micaiah said, ‘If you return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me.’ And he said, ‘Hear, you peoples, all of you!’” (verse 28). Then he’s hauled off to jail and we hear no more about Micaiah.

If you continue with the rest of the story in 1 Kings 22, King Ahab *does* go out to battle. ***Guess what happens!*** Right! He *is killed* (in spite of an elaborate disguise he wears so the enemy troops won’t recognize him as the king). Micaiah had indeed spoken the truth from the Lord.

“Tell them what they want to hear”, the older, jaded stockbroker told his young colleague. Micaiah was pressured to do that. *But he didn’t!* What a great story! But what does it say to you and me? I can tell you what it says to *me*: ***Sometimes God want to tell us things we don’t want to hear.*** Ahab preferred listening to 400 prophets who gave a buttery, trumped up message, than to 1 prophet who really did speak what God had to say.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is Good News! God wants to save us, and bless us. But often before we can be saved or progress in our walk with the Lord, God has to tell us what we don’t want to hear, things like: You *think* you’re a Christian, but you need a spiritual rebirth... You say you trust me, but still you worry way too much... You have to turn from this habit, this sin, or it will ruin your life and your relationship with Me... It’s not the other person or other people you’re blaming who are the problem; it’s *you*... You’re never going to grow closer to me and be useful to me until you take time to pray and get into the Bible more.

Have you ever had an experience where God spoke a hard word, a sobering word, to you – something you *didn’t want to hear*, but knew *you had to hear*? No, you probably didn’t hear an audible voice, God literally speaking. But God spoke to you through a friend, a sermon, a counselor, a spouse or children. And that person became a “Micaiah” through whom the Lord told you the truth.

Sometimes, because God loves us, He wants to tell us something don’t want to hear. It’s like

parent-child relationships. Loving parents, caring parents, sometimes tell their children things the kids don't want to hear: "Don't touch that hot stove." "These friends are no good for you." "Don't hit your little sister over the head with your toy truck" "Don't lie and try to cover up." God is like that with us. He gives us the Ten Commandments. For example, "Don't steal. Don't commit adultery". God gives us moral laws, not to be mean and cranky, but for our own good. Often, *we don't want to hear His commandments. But we need to!*

Who are the "Micaiah's" in your life? The people God may be using to tell us the truth about ourselves and our situation? Mike Slaughter is the lead pastor at Ginghamburg United Methodist Church in Ohio. It's a great innovative, teaching megachurch. Mike writes in one of his books how God used a group of friends to get his attention with the truth. "'We don't like what we are seeing in your marriage.' The words stung. Carolyn and I had been members of a Sunday night home group that had been meeting every other week for more than two years. Bill and Donna, Jess and Mindy, and Barb and Jim had become some of our best friends...the words stung because they were coming from friends. Even more, I knew they were true. Our Christian sisters and brothers loved us enough to hold us accountable. I felt failure and shame. I am a pastor who belongs to Jesus Christ, who believes the Bible, and wants to live a life that honors God. Yet I was failing in my marriage." As a result of this honesty on the part of his small group, Mike and his wife Carolyn took action. They got help. Both had the courage to share with those in their church (and others beyond their congregation) the truth about their marriage. God used that group of friends to tell Mike the truth about himself.

The story about Micaiah reminds me that sometimes God wants to tell us things don't want to hear in order to help us and save us. But it also shows me that *sometimes we need to be the one to say things people don't want to hear*. It's hard to imagine the courage it took for Micaiah to stand before not just one king, but two – when all of the court prophets were schmoozing the king, saying what he wanted to hear.

Are there times when God, au be calling you to say what others around, or some other person, doesn't want to hear? Perhaps to challenge the status quo, or confront someone about a behavior, or to go against the prevailing practice or view? The Bible has a phrase for this: it is "Speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). It is speaking the truth about a person or a situation, but doing so in a loving and caring manner.

We might need to do this in our family. It could mean confronting a family member about a destructive habit or addiction, rather than just sugar coating it or pretending it isn't happening. It might involved being honest about a relationship with a family member – for example, as an adult, going to a parent and saying, "You know, when I was growing up, you did this. Perhaps you meant well, but I've carried a lot of anger about that all these years." I have seen so many people in therapy carrying with them issues that were never resolved with their parents, because they never had the courage to say what that parent may not have wanted to hear.

All of this plays out in the work setting, too. Maybe we are expected to act in questionable ways, not quite above board. Play our own version of "tell them (our supervisors) what they want

to hear”. Every once in a while someone has the courage to be a “whistleblower” – to tell the truth. I heard a pastor tell of a long distance trucker in his congregation. This trucker came to the pastor, wondering what to do when the common practice was to fudge on log books, so one can drive more hours than the law permits. The pastor asked this trucker, what’s the right thing, what’s the thing Jesus want you to do? He knew it was wrong, so he quit his job. He took a stand. God did provide graciously open the door for another job where this man could live with more integrity.

Politicians are experts at telling people what they want to hear, aren’t they! “If you like your insurance you can keep your insurance.” “If you like your doctor you can keep your doctor. Period.” Lest I be accused of partisanship, there was a President from the other party who said something like: “Read my lips; no more taxes.” That was George H. W. Bush. I actually just finished a biography of the older Bush written by Jon Meacham. It’s called *Destiny and Power*, and won a Pulitzer Prize. It shows how Bush agonized over going back on that promise. A few years ago I read a book about Franklin Roosevelt, and his first 100 days in office. Roosevelt, in dealing with people, excelled at telling people what they wanted to hear, then going ahead and doing just what he wanted anyway! How many politicians are good at telling people what they want to hear, to get votes, to win elections!

Tell them what they want to hear”. ***This certainly pertains to issues in the Church.*** Some congregations can be the last place where you find people really being honest! In some churches, people are allowed to get away with all sorts of bad behaviors, ways of talking to others, that they would never get away with in their job, or social network. Often in the church we shy away from holding people accountable for their actions because we want to be nice, we want to be “Christian”. But in the process, this creates dysfunction within the congregation. I’m thinking of a pastor I know, a tremendously gifted pastor, who has served several churches that have grown amazingly under his ministry. He once told me someone spoke to him in a very disrespectful way. My pastor friend told this man, “Don’t you ever talk to me in that way again.” I can’t help but believe that his firmness in confronting this man, his telling this man something he probably didn’t want to hear, is part of the reason he has provided strong leadership for his congregations.

As a ***preacher***, at times I can feel the temptation to “tell you what you want to hear” in my sermons. Some sermons are hard to preach, because they are not soothing and not comforting. Maybe I’m preaching about a controversial subject, or calling attention to an issue that we would rather ignore, or presenting a view that I know some in the congregation will not like. But thank God, I have found that when I preach hard messages, and tell people what they *don’t* want to hear but *need to hear*, while some may be upset, others come and say: “Thanks for having the courage to deal with that issue!”

“Tell them what they want to hear!” Sometimes God tells us things we don’t want to hear, in order to help us and save us. Sometimes *we* do well to tell others something they need to hear – not because we don’t care, but because we do care!

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