

I. A Story of Kings, Thrones, and Prophets (1 Kings 22)

- A. Ahab decided to break a three-year peace (ceasefire?) with the Syrians by scheming to take back one of Israel's cities from Syria's control. He enlisted Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah to help. Jehoshaphat agreed, but insisted they consult a prophet of the Lord first.
- B. Notice the similarities between the two scenes described:

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. (1 Kgs 22:10, ESV)

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..." (1 Kgs 22:19, ESV)

- 1. On earth – two kings on two thrones, with a throng of prophets before them.
 - 2. In heaven – one King on one throne, with the host of heaven assembled before Him.
- C. The kings went to war despite Micaiah's warning, and the battle played out as Micaiah had predicted it would.
 - D. This story demonstrates two things for us:
 - 1. Human kings tend to insist on doing what they want, sometimes out of deliberate rebellion against God (Ps. 2:1-6).
 - 2. God is sovereign over their scheming and rebellion and will even use it for His purposes (Gen. 50:19-20; Acts 4:24-28).

II. The Church and Prophetic Witness

- A. As a reminder, the New Testament calls believers "strangers and exiles on the earth" (Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 1:1,17; 2:11) and tells us that our citizenship is now in the kingdom of heaven (Eph. 2:19; Phil. 3:20). More than just citizens of that kingdom, we are its ambassadors on the earth (2 Cor. 5:20; Eph. 6:20).
 - 1. Ambassador: "an official envoy; an authorized representative or messenger" (Merriam-Webster)
 - 2. If we were to find a role in the Bible that is synonymous/similar to that of Ambassador, it would be *prophet*.

3. Ambassadors need to remain clear about which kingdom they represent; though they live in a foreign land, they must continue to represent and speak clearly for the interests of their homeland. We can see Col. 2:6-10 in this light:

⁶Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him...⁸See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.⁹For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,¹⁰and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

- B. Throughout the Bible, the people of God in exile (Abraham – Moses, Babylonian exile – New Testament Church) are always called to be faithful witnesses of God and His ways; *sometimes* they are elevated into positions of political influence (i.e. Joseph and Daniel). We never see them given absolute, or even the lion's share of, political power.
 1. The thought of political power can be enticing, but it's not the Biblical model for effecting change ("directed, radical").
 2. Righteous laws do not make a nation righteous; no one is made righteous by the law (Rom. 3:20,28). Righteous laws help *restrain* sinful behaviour, but they do not make people righteous.
 - a. "It may be true that the law can't make a man love me, but it can restrain him from lynching me. And I think that's pretty important also. So while the law may not change the hearts of men, it does change the habits of men."
- Martin Luther King, Jr.
 3. Whether we have "righteous" government or not, the only way our nation will turn in a lasting way is by a widespread change of heart at the grassroots level ("incremental, organic").
 - a. Even if a "righteous" government is elected, that "reign" is only guaranteed for a few years at most; *that kingdom can be shaken*.
- C. In general, the Church is to be a prophetic witness of the Kingdom of God in the nations, provinces, and cities we live in. The function of prophecy that is consistent through both the Old and New Testaments is to provoke and call people to love the Lord and walk in His ways.
 1. Provoke – to be living proof of the blessing that comes from living life fully submitted to God; not unlike Israel's call to be a light to the Gentiles (Deut. 4:5-8; 28:1-14; Ps. 67:1-2; Is. 49:6; Acts 13:47; Mt. 5:2-16; Gal. 5:22-23).

2. Call – to verbally communicate (preach, exhort, appeal, etc.) the truth, values, and principles of the Kingdom of God to unbelievers, including people in power. Examples include Moses to Pharaoh, Jonah to Assyria, Elijah to Ahab, etc.

III. The Prophet's Challenge: Humility and Submission

- A. There were only two Old Testament prophets who led the nation of Israel: Moses and Samuel. They did not do so as kings, but as judges. Outside of them, there are zero instances of God supplanting a king with a prophet.
 1. Joseph – prophetic gift (interpreted dreams), served Pharaoh
 2. Daniel – prophetic gift (interpreted dreams), served kings of Babylon, Medo-Persia
 3. Nathan – confronted David about sin, but remained subject to him
 4. Multiple OT prophets confronted kings about sin, wandering from the Lord
- B. Here's the challenge: how do you confront or correct someone *while remaining submitted to them*? What kind of heart posture does that require?
- C. The same standard is upheld for the Church in the New Testament.

¹Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ²Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment...⁵Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience... (excerpts from Rom. 13:1-7, ESV)

¹Remind them [the believers] to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, ²to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. (Tit. 3:1-2, ESV)

¹³Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. ¹⁶Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. ¹⁷Honour everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the emperor. (1 Pet. 2:13-17, ESV)

1. We see this in Paul's life: he didn't criticize or speak roughly to Roman governors, but instead used his opportunity to appeal for their salvation (Acts 26:28-29).
2. There was one instance where Paul answered harshly, but he immediately repented:

²And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. ³Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?" ⁴Those who stood by said, "Would you revile God's high priest?" ⁵And Paul said, "I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'" (Acts 23:2-5, ESV)

IV. Conclusion

- A. The Church's role is to be ambassadors (prophetic witness) of the Kingdom in our society today. We do this by:
1. Communicating the ways, values, and principles of the Kingdom.
 2. Communicating *in the ways of the Kingdom* (Mt. 5-7, Fruit of the Spirit).
 3. Living lives of obedience to the same ways, values, and principles that we preach, so that people see the proof of our message demonstrated in our lives.
- B. Remember 1 Kings 22: kings on thrones, making plans, enacting wills...but God is on His throne, sovereign over their plans. Which counsel are we seeking to be part of (Jer. 23:18-22)?
1. It is tempting to grasp for the kingdom here (political authority) and lose sight of the Kingdom we are inheriting. The unseen Kingdom is the one that cannot be shaken.
 2. Beware of the more extreme, militant expressions of Christian Nationalism. There is danger in equating a political party or expression with the Kingdom of God. A Christian government does not guarantee revival or reformation.
- C. In all our interactions with government and those in authority, remember the pattern that Jesus established for us to follow:
1. He could have come to be served, but He came to serve (Mt. 20:28; Phil. 2:7)
 2. He could have raised His voice, but He came in meekness (Mt. 11:28-30; Is. 42:1-4)
 3. He could have overthrown governments, but He submitted (Jn. 19:11; Mt. 22:17-21)
 4. He could have saved Himself, but He submitted to death (Mt. 26:53; Phil. 2:8)
 - a. The cross was the symbol of shame and defeat, but it was Jesus' means of victory. The cross is still the way we overcome today.

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Cor. 1:18, ESV; cf. Rev.12:11)