

CHRISTIAN WORKER

“We are workers together with Him...” (2 Corinthians 6:1)

VOLUME 108, NUMBER 2

MICAIAH, ONE WHO SPOKE TRUTH

BJ Clarke

The Alliance

During a visit with Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, Ahab, king of Israel, requested that they form an alliance in going to battle to reclaim Ramoth-Gilead from the Syrians. Jehoshaphat expressed to Ahab his desire to unite to fight—if Ahab would inquire whether it was God’s will (1 Kings 22:4-5).

The “A-lie-ance”

With about 400 of his prophets assembled, Ahab asked, “Shall I go against Ramoth-Gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king” (v. 6). Something they said, or perhaps how they said it, indicated to Jehoshaphat that these men were not true prophets. He could tell that they had entered into an alliance to lie. They were going to tell Ahab whatever he wanted to hear. Consequently, Jehoshaphat said to Ahab, “Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might inquire of him?” (v. 7).

The Reluctance

Ahab confessed that there was “yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord” (v. 8). Why was he not a part of the original prophetic party who assembled before the kings? Ahab admitted “but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil” (v. 8).

The Insistence

Jehoshaphat insisted that Micaiah be brought to prophesy. Meanwhile, as Ahab and Jehoshaphat sat on their thrones in royal apparel, all the prophets continued to prophesy. In

particular, Zedekiah “made him horns of iron” and claimed “Thus saith the Lord, with these shalt thou push the Syrians, until thou have consumed them” (v. 11). Zedekiah was not alone in his insistence. In fact, “all the prophets prophesied so” (v. 12).

The messenger who was sent to retrieve Micaiah insisted, “the words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one mouth: let thy word I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak that which is good” (v. 13).

The Reliance

Micaiah minced no words in reply. He made it perfectly clear that he would rely upon the Lord, and the Lord alone, for the message he delivered. Specifically, he said, “As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak” (v. 14). Micaiah would not be intimidated by peer pressure to conform his message to please the masses. He refused

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SYMPTOMS OF A THRIVING CHURCH

Cody Westbrook

Though the reality of weak and dying congregations of God's people saddens us, we take comfort in the fact that there are many congregations throughout the world that are thriving. In addressing the 7 churches in Asia, Jesus highlighted the good along with the bad (Rev. 2-3). A careful examination of each address reveals important characteristics which are present in healthy and thriving churches.

Congregations that are hardworking (Rev. 2:2-3; 2:19). To the church at Ephesus Jesus said, "I know your... labor" (Rev. 2:2). The word "labor" has to do with exhausting and toilsome work. As we sometimes say, "he works his fingers to the bone." To the church at Thyatira Jesus said, "...and as for your works, the last are more than the first" (Rev. 2:19). Such a commendation indicates that their service in the Kingdom was growing and improving with time. These two passages make clear the fact that Christ wants hardworking congregations.

We are "created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Eph. 2:10) and we must be "zealous" in them (Tit. 2:14). God does not want congregations to exist solely as a "worshipping society," in which members show up on Sunday to worship but put forth no other effort in service to God. He wants congregations who are busy teaching (2 Tim. 2:2), serving (Gal. 6:10), and encouraging (Rom. 14:19). Such congregations exist because of the individuals who make them up. If congregations which work like Ephesus and Thyatira are to exist, then Christians who work like Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:5), and Tryphena and Tryphosa (Rom. 16:12) must exist. What about you? What about your congregation?

Congregations that are opportunistic (Rev. 3:7-8). To the church in Philadelphia Jesus said, "See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name" (Rev. 3:8). This congregation was small but powerful. Their resources were limited, perhaps, but they had opportunity because the Lord had opened a door for them that no man could close, not even their enemies.

Opportunistic congregations are like the men of

Issachar in 1 Chronicles 12:32. They know the times. They are in tune with the needs and concerns of the people, and they are constantly evaluating themselves to determine how best to maximize every opportunity to work and serve. When the disciples returned to Jesus in John 4 they seemed oblivious to the opportunities before them. Jesus had just finished talking with the Samaritan woman who subsequently went into the city and told everyone about Him. Instead of focusing on the approaching crowd of people, the disciples were concerned with whether Jesus had eaten. So He said, "Do you not say, There are still four months and then comes the harvest? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest" (John 4:35). Concerning your congregation, are you more like the men of Issachar or the disciples?

Congregations that oppose sin (Rev. 2:2). Unlike many other congregations addressed, Ephesus was commended for her faithfulness in opposing sin and error. Jesus said, "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not and have found them liars" (Rev. 2:2). To "test" is to determine the nature of something through close examination. Ephesus looked closely at false apostles and rejected them. They could not "bear," or tolerate, them, or any evil, to any degree. Faithful congregations follow in their footsteps. We love the good and hate the evil (Rom. 12:9).

Sin is a cancer and when it is allowed to exist within a congregation of God's people, it will ultimately bring about their ruin. "A little leaven leavens the whole lump" (1 Cor. 5:6) which is why Paul commanded the Ephesian elders to "take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers" (Acts 20:28). If sin is present within the body we must "cut off the opportunity" (2 Cor. 11:12) for it to spread. Such is not always easy. It often involves uncomfortable conversations, confrontation, and no shortage of tears and heartache. Yet, it must be done to preserve the overall health of the body.

Congregations that are faithful through persecution (Rev. 2:3; 9; 13; 19; 3:4). Ephesus had borne and been patient (Rev. 2:3). Smyrna suffered through tribulation and poverty yet remained faithful (Rev. 2:9). Pergamos is where Satan's seat was (Rev 2:13). Thyatira was patient (Rev. 2:19), and even Sardis had a few which had not defiled their garments (Rev. 3:4). Though many of these congregations had problems which needed to be addressed, they were all commended to some degree for their steadfastness in persecution.

Persecution and Christianity go hand in hand (cf. Matt. 5:10-12; 2 Tim. 3:12). It is not a question of if but when, and how severe the persecution will be. What must be remembered is that trial and persecution can strengthen us if we endure them faithfully. James wrote, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" (Jas. 1:2-3). It is interesting to note that nothing is said of Laodicea's suffering. Perhaps this is a reason why they were lukewarm. Faithful congregations stand for truth and standing for truth will inevitably draw the ire of the enemy. But regardless of the severity of the storm, they stand firm and endure.

Congregations that are rich where it matters (Rev. 2:9). Smyrna was an important center of Imperial worship. The trade guilds and religious cults were important there and whoever refused to acknowledge Caesar as Lord would be excluded. The Saints there struggled to make it. Jesus described them as "poor." A term that refers to abject poverty where one possesses nothing. And yet He also said they were rich. Not in material goods, but in spiritual (cf. Matt. 6:19-21).

The overall health of a congregation is not measured by the size of their building, number of members, or financial resources. Individuals make up the whole and if the individuals are sound then so too the whole. A congregation of 25 faithful servants is more powerful than a congregation of 500 who are unsound.

Though it is tragic to see sick congregations shrivel away to nothing, we take great joy in the fact that so many congregations of God's people are healthy and thriving. God's Word provides the information the church needs to thrive, and every congregation has the ability to follow the prescription. Sick churches can repent and be healthy again. Sound churches can ensure their health long-term. With scripture as your guide, make an honest evaluation of yourself and your congregation. Are you willing to do what it takes to ensure that your congregation flourishes?

CW

CONFESSING OR DENYING ?

Bill Jackson

“**W**hosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. but whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven” (Matt 10:32-33).

Among the several ways in the New Testament by which proper response to God, and improper response, are pictured, this is one of the most striking. We either confess him or deny him. It has to mean, of course, far more than just making a statement with the mouth, and seeing it in context helps that point to stand out. Romans 10:10 makes reference to confession with the mouth. Here, in Matthew 10, far more is emphasized.

Notice that in the context, Jesus is preparing his disciples for a life of hardship, setting before them a picture of having their message rejected (v. 14), being in circumstances of danger (v. 16), being brought up on civil charges (vv. 17-18), having family members to betray them (v. 21) and yea, to be hated of all men (v. 22). Now, such a foreboding picture immediately would cause weak men to think in terms of taking an unfaithful course in order to avoid the peril. Jesus then urges: "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (v. 28).

Now, after those points, he states our text verses, showing that the confessing is CONFESSING IN LIFE, AND WITH LIFE, and with forfeiture of life if necessary! In like manner, one could, for sake of fear or other unworthy motivation, choose to be disloyal and refuse to bear whatever burdens that come, and perhaps save the life, but it would be in denial of the Lord! In reality, to REFUSE TO CONFESS is to DENY!

We can continually express thanks that we live in circumstances wherein one can have faith, life in faith, serve in faith and teach the faith, and persecution of a physical way will not come. Yet, there are other ways wherein many fail to confess him, having to do, simply, with faithfulness. They do not confess him in consistently living for him, serving him, worshipping him, etc. Thus, they are in denial of him! And it is all the more shameful because friends, family and neighbors know that we propose to be Christians. Then, we

end up, before all of these, living contrary to his purposes for us. We thus deny him! The question, for you and me: Is my daily life a CONFESSION of the Lord, or is it a DENIAL?

CW

IS THIS NOT...?

Mike Riley

When Jesus revealed His divinity to the Jews residing in Nazareth, they questioned His authority (Matt. 13:53-58). This was not unexpected, considering they only knew Him as “the carpenter’s son” (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3). After all, Jesus’ teaching was quite different from that of the Jewish religious teachers of the day (Matt. 7:28-29; John 7:46). By and large, the Galileans could not believe that “the carpenter’s son” was the Son of God. Because they had known him from boyhood, they became “offended” – literally a “stumbling-block” (cf. Rom. 9:33; 1 Cor. 1:23) when He claimed to be the Messiah (John 1:43-51). They could not accept Jesus as their king, even though He was their social equal. They had a false perception of Jesus despite the prophecy of Jesus’ lowly nature (Isa. 53:1-3).

From the time of Samuel, the Jews had desired a king to rise up and make them a mighty nation (cf. 1 Sam. 8:1-22). Even the Lord’s apostles did not fully understand the nature of His kingdom (Acts 1:6). They only knew Jesus as a local boy from the insignificant town of Nazareth, not able to perceive Him as having any kingly credentials. Thus, their prejudice hindered any proper evaluation of the Man. Prejudice is a terrible malady, blinding us, and making us insensible to even the most obvious of truths. Unfortunately, few of us are entirely free from its negative influence, but we need to always be aware of its dangers, calculating its influence before drawing hasty conclusions.

Jesus recognized their bigotry with this proverbial statement, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house” (Matt. 13:57). Because they were unable to see Jesus as more than a common man, Matthew records, “Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief” (Matt. 13:58). However, their prejudice could not restrict Jesus’ powers — He simply

knew their hearts, knowing they would not receive him regardless of what they saw (Matt. 9:4; 13:58; Mark 6:5-6; cf. Luke 16:27-31).

In today’s “religious” world, we often see man’s ideologies taking precedence over God’s truth (2 Tim. 4:3-4; 2 Pet. 2:1-2). Removing human bias will always be a never ending struggle, but mankind must see Jesus as more than “the carpenter’s son” in order to be saved (John 8:24; John 12:48). Brethren, what are we doing to teach this truth to mankind? (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16).

CW

FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE

Andy Baker

What a mistake in that spring day of so long ago! What began as one man staying home alone ended with adultery, an illegitimate child’s death, the death of an innocent man, and the heartbreak and ruin of a family! How sin so easily ensnares us and our righteous judgment can be skewed and distorted by being alone in the wrong place!

David could have gone with Joab. All the kings were going out to battle, why not David (2 Sam. 11:1)? Remaining in Jerusalem by himself would prove to be a costly mistake that could have been avoided (cf. 2 Sam. 11:1-12:23)!

Solomon, a son of David and Bathsheba, writes that “a man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; He rages against all wise judgment” (Prov. 18:1). What did David’s isolation accomplish, other than ultimate heartache?

Despite the lesson of David, many Christians try to isolate themselves from what they know is right under the guise that they are completely in control. **Satan waits for just such an opportunity.** Peter tells us, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world” (1 Pet. 5:8-9). In this warning, Peter gives several commands for the Christian who wants to stay off the devil’s menu:

There is wisdom in sobriety: the word “sober” carries the idea of being “collected in spirit” and “aware of self and surroundings.” Satan recognizes that our passions can first blind us and then destroy us...we should recognize it, too!

Being aware when we are in a potentially sinful situation will help keep our thoughts grounded in who we are as God's people (2 Cor. 10:5-6). How many now broken homes could have been saved by men and women who "lost themselves" in the "heat of the moment"?

There is power in resistance: The writer James said, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (Jas. 4:7). The inference is that one can just as purposefully put himself in the devil's grasp as he can oppose the devil's advance. God is more powerful (1 Cor. 10:13)!

There is safety in numbers: The fellowship enjoyed by God's people is, in part, for the purpose of being thoughtful and considerate of one another and warning each other of impending dangers which threaten our spiritual lives (cf. Heb. 10:24-25; Gal. 6:1-2).

There are ample opportunities for Christians to be isolated in our own "fortress of solitude." Television and the Internet have made sinful desires easily accessible in isolation. Do not forget what happened when David stayed home when he should have gone!

CW

THE EFFECTIVE MINISTRY

Rick Brumback

No person has ever affected human affairs at their most radical level more than Jesus, the "Word become flesh" (John 1:14). But upon what did His power of influence depend? Extraordinary earthly prerogative? Wealth? Education? Social standing? No; in fact in these areas He was largely unremarkable. Nevertheless, He changed the world.

1. Looks With the emphasis on beauty and looks so prevalent today, some may suppose that we could have greater influence, and greater respect, among others if we were all comely. Surely if we had "drop-dead" looks like supermodels we could command impressive audiences, right? Well, consider that stunning good looks were not possessed by the Son of God. Speaking of Jesus, Isaiah said, "For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him" (53:2). Not only do we not have a description of what Deity on earth looked like, but we have the clear

statement that His looks did not constitute His great appeal. Evidently in appearance, Jesus was rather ordinary.

2. Wealth We know that Joseph was a carpenter (Matt. 13:53-55), and the sacrifices offered by Joseph and Mary at the birth of Jesus reveal the poor financial state of His family (Luke 2:21-24; cf. Lev. 12:2,6,8). Therefore, all that Jesus accomplished in bringing people to God was done without a large personal fortune or an in exhaustible church budget. It is easy for us to say that if we could afford to promote and conduct this event or that program we could have great success in bringing the Gospel to the lost, but this places the emphasis on the wrong item—money. Certainly it is good for us to be able to pursue different projects, made possible by the generosity of the saints, but money is only one tool used by the willing servant.

3. Education Surely if we all had many college degrees and expansive vocabularies we would meet with greater success in teaching others of Jesus' saving grace and the need to obey His words. Others would be so amazed at our erudition that they would fall at our feet and beg to be instructed in the ways of righteousness, right? Before we admit an educational handicap we would be advised to remember that our Savior did not possess an impressive formal education, but indeed the masses clamored to hear His words. "Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught. And the Jews marveled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" (John 7:14-15). No, it was something more substantial than His formal education that attracted so many.

4. Social Standing Never did Jesus receive endorsement from the Jewish leaders of any of the sects. Even those chief Jews who believed on Him refused to admit such because they had their reputation to worry about (John 12:42-43). Everything He did was in spite of, not because of, His reception by the leaders of the people. We might be tempted to think that if we could join forces, or gain the endorsement of some larger "Christian" associations or institutions, we could reach more people. The church of our Lord must realize, however, that if the leaders of the religious world did not accept Him, likely we will not be accepted if we preach and teach His word. We may never be featured as the keynote speaker at a "Christian" event, nor welcomed by the prominent religious leaders of our day (unless we sacrifice truth), but we can still be effective in our ordinary circumstances as was Jesus.

In these four areas our Lord was very "ordinary," as we and most others are. Nonetheless, Jesus was unmatched

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Southwest School of Bible Studies

Time	First Year	Time	Second Year
Monday			
9:00-10:20	Judges/Ruth - Matt Gibson	9:00-11:50	Minor Prophets - Clay Bond
10:30-11:50	Christianity/Philo. - Steven Lloyd		
1:00-2:20	Geo/Arch - Matt Gibson	1:00—2:20	Greek 3 - Steven Lloyd
2:30-3:50	GSP	2:30-3:50	2 Corinthians - Matt Gibson
Tuesday			
9:00-11:50	Acts 1 - Carl McCann	9:00-11:50	Peter/James - Joey Davis
1:00-3:50	Joshua - Joey Davis	1:00-3:50	Preaching Practicum - Carl McCann
Wednesday			
9:00-10:20	Judges/Ruth - Matt Gibson	9:00-10:20	Ezekiel - Steven Lloyd
10:30-11:50	Christianity/Phil. Steven Lloyd	10:30-11:50	2 Corinthians - Matt Gibson
1:00-2:20	Geo/Arch - Matt Gibson	1:00-2:20	Greek 3 - Steven Lloyd
2:30-3:50	GSP	2:30-3:50	GSP
Thursday			
9:00-11:50	1 & 2 Samuel - Clay Bond	9:00-11:50	1 & 2 Thess/Jude - Jim Nash
1:00-3:50	Technology - Jim Nash	1:00-3:50	Counseling - Steven Lloyd
Friday			
9:00-11:50	Topical Preaching - Cody Westbrook	9:00-10:20	Ezekiel - Steven Lloyd
		10:30-11:50	GSP
1:00-3:50	Deuteronomy - Mel Hutzler	1:00-3:50	Daniel - Matt Gibson



Jan. 31 Class Begins
 Feb. 21-23 Rob Whitacre
 Feb. 24-27 Arise (Southwest)
 Mar. 3-6 PTP (SPARK)
 April 15 Quarter ends

in bringing the good news to peoples of all walks. He was *extraordinary* in the ways that matter: dedication to serving God's will (Mark 14:36); speaking God's pure truth in love (John 6:63; 8:31,32; 12:48-50); true compassion for the needs of mankind (Mark 6:31-34; Luke 19:10; John 15:13); seeing the pressing need to work for salvation (John 9:4). Because He was exemplary in these most crucial of aspects, He could claim the constant companionship of the Father, "And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him," (John 8:29). Brethren, we may be ordinary in the ways of the world, but if we will be extraordinary in the ways of God there is no end to the good we may accomplish in Christ Jesus!

CW



to follow a multitude to do evil (Ex. 23:2). He would rely upon God and not men for the content of his message. His attitude is like Paul in Galatians 1:10: "For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." Paul did not rely upon men for the source of his message: "But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:11-12). Likewise, Micaiah relied completely upon God for his message. When Micaiah appeared, Ahab asked, "Micaiah, shall we go against Ramoth-Gilead to battle, or shall we forbear? And he answered him, Go, and prosper: for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king" (1 Kings 22:15). You would think Ahab would have been overjoyed. After all, Micaiah's words were the very

same words spoken by the other prophets. However, Ahab's response reveals that there must have been something in the tone of Micaiah's words to indicate that he was speaking sarcastically. Ahab said, "How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the Lord?" (v. 16). It would be hard to find a better example of words spoken in sanctimonious hypocrisy. Ahab had no real love for the truth, but he was about to hear an unpleasant truth. Micaiah spoke of how Israel would be scattered as sheep without a shepherd (v. 17). Ahab turned to Jehoshaphat and said, "I told you that Micaiah never has anything good to say about me" (v.18). Micaiah explained that God had allowed a lying spirit to lead the prophets to encourage Ahab to go into a battle in which he would lose his life (vv. 19-23).

The Defiance

As Micaiah preached God's truth, Zedekiah defiantly "went near, and smote him on the cheek" and mockingly asked, "Which way went the Spirit of the Lord from me to speak unto thee?" (v. 24). Undeterred, Micaiah assured Zedekiah that he would someday personally experience the fulfillment of Micaiah's prophecies (v. 25). At this point Ahab ordered Micaiah to prison with the following orders: "Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with the bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace" (v. 27).

The Assurance

Micaiah assured the king, "If thou return at all in peace, the Lord hath not spoken by me" (v. 28). Micaiah understood that "when a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him" (Deut. 18:22). Micaiah knew his prophecies would come true because they originated with God—not him. Hence, he begged the people, "Hearken, O people, every one of you" (1 Kings 22:28).

Conclusion

Micaiah is truly an unsung hero of the Bible. He appears as a loyal prophet who would rather suffer persecution than to preach more or less than God revealed. He cared not for the demands nor the applause of men. He disappears from Scripture as an obedient prophet who preached the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. May God give us more Micaiahs!

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“To Know Jesus and...make Him known”

From the Director's desk



Steven Lloyd
Director SWSBS

The work at the Southwest School of Bible Studies can be described as having been in a state of “flux.” By that I mean, since I arrived with brother Don Walker mid-2017, we have experienced significant changes. Change has been one of the constants.

Aside from the initial change of moving to Texas, the loss of brother Walker was the first big change. Becoming director afterward was a big change for me and the school. Matt Gibson joined our full-time faculty. I count that as a good change. Then there was the onslaught of COVID-19. Two faculty members went in directions that did not include the school. So, of necessity, there was a change in the way we had to think about faculty and class structure. Others were invited to join us: Stan Crowley, Tom Moore, Jeff Sweeten, Jim Nash, Mel Hutzler, Joey Davis, John Baker, and Wade Webster. And then, more recently, we are dealing with a second round of COVID. No doubt, the state of “flux” will continue. One must remain flexible.

There are some constants also. The solid leadership of our elders—Bill Siebert, Brett Gerhardt, and Mark Speir—is a constant. There is also the generous and constant financial help from supporters. Our curriculum is the same. Our goal—to glorify God—has not changed. The constants are like anchors that keep us from drifting or losing sight of our goal. The “constants” of our existence are what keep us anchored in spite of the things that change.

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