

Our OT story is one of my favourites although it becomes a bit tedious in the telling. Basically, there are the two kings Ahab k. of Israel, and Jehoshaphat k. of Judah, and a third nation, Aram, with whom Israel has a grudge.

Ahab wants to go to war with Aram and asks Jehoshaphat to fight alongside.

Jehoshaphat agrees, but only if the prophets say it is OK.

Ahab consults his prophets, about 400 of them and they agree with their king. "Go to war" - "You'll win" they say

Jehoshaphat notices that they are prophets of pagan gods - Ba'al and Asherah and asks for a prophet of the LORD. There is only one - Micaiah, son of Imlah. Ahab doesn't like him because he doesn't say what Ahab wants but only what the LORD tells him.

Micaiah prophesies the truth that the 400 prophets have a lying spirit and that Ahab will, in fact, die in battle.

Ahab gets angry, throws Micaiah into prison and goes into battle. And of course, as Micaiah foretold, Ahab is horribly killed.

Micaiah ben Imlah

Hope - God's promises confirmed

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday  
of Advent

1 Kings 22. 1 - 28  
Romans 15. 4 - 13

Here is the key issue of this story

Micaiah says to Ahab -  
you will not return from the field of battle.  
400 prophets say to Ahab -  
you will return, victorious.

How do you know which prophet is a true prophet  
and which are the false prophets?

The key verse is 1 Kings 28. 28

*Micaiah declared,  
"If you ever return safely,  
the LORD has not spoken through me."*

In a nutshell

the one whose prophecy comes true  
is the true prophet.

The ones whose prophecies do not come true  
are the false prophets.

But Micaiah goes on to add - same verse

*"Mark my words, all you people!"*

In other words, once you have determined  
that Micaiah is a true prophet  
you don't have to **keep** testing him.  
The LORD speaks through him  
Mark his words in the future.

And equally - the false prophets -  
do not listen to them at all. Ever.

A simple test - the LORD speaks the truth  
therefore his prophets speak the truth.

Trust them.

Once it is spelled out it seems quite clear.

In a previous chapter, in conflict with the same king  
and his false prophets of Ba'al and Asherah  
Elijah had a contest - the fiery contest on Mount Carmel.  
Again bad odds - 450 to 1 against

He also made it clear.

"The God who answers with fire - he is God!"  
and by implication - "the one who doesn't - isn't."

You would think that the people  
might have begun to learn.

You would think that King Ahab  
might have begun to learn.

Ahab's prophets serve a false god  
who lost the contest with Elijah.

Ditch them.

Ahab's prophets prophesied words  
which did not come true.

Ditch them.

But his conceit overruled his wisdom.  
The many false prophets flattered him  
and the one true prophet annoyed him.  
So he went with the attractive lies  
and rejected the hard truth.  
And he died. As Micaiah said he would.

We also see the contrast  
between the two kings.

Ahab was a bad king - led astray by his wife,  
the notorious Queen Jezebel.

Jehoshaphat was a good king, for the most part,  
and he went a long way to cleaning up Judah.

Ahab served the Ba'al  
Jehoshaphat served the LORD, Yahweh

And yet , despite all this history,  
the people of God, Israel and Judah,  
made their wrong choices again and again.  
And a lot of it was because their kings  
made wrong leadership decisions,  
despite the teachings of their scriptures.

Romans 15 is on this same theme.  
Not so much about true and false prophets  
but about the truth of the scriptures.  
They record the history of Israel and Judah  
so that God's people might learn!

And yet Paul is faced in so many of his churches  
with the obstinacy of the Jewish Christians  
who go with a tradition which is not biblical.

In every age,  
the Jews have had their false teachers,  
in Jesus' time it was the Scribes and Pharisees  
who added so much to the biblical teaching  
that no-one could comply with the law.

Paul proclaimed a gospel of grace that set us free from the law.

It flatly contradicted the "extra" teachings of Judaism while remaining completely faithful to the core teaching of scripture.

So we get some confusing teaching in Romans where at one point Paul seems to condemn the Law and at another point he upholds it as God's word.

It is this "core" teaching versus "extra" teaching that he is trying to sort out.

And he is trying to set God's people free from the "extras" that are not from God.

And he too is looking for a test, a "proof" that will sift the good from the bad the true from the false.

And in Romans 15. 4 we have such a test.

*Everything that was written in the past  
was to teach us  
so that through endurance and the  
encouragement of the scriptures  
we might have hope.*

And this little theme of "hope" runs through the next verses.

And it has its fruit.

"Hope" is our belief in God's promises which as yet we cannot see.

The fruit, if the promises are true,  
is God's peace in our hearts.

The fruit, if we agree on the same "Truth"  
is a spirit of unity among God's people  
and the result - to glorify God.

We have one goal - the coming of Christ's Kingdom  
and if we operate within the values of that kingdom  
we will know something of its fruit now.  
This is such a common theme in all Paul's writings.

Hope is something beyond the horizon  
but we begin to experience its flavour now  
by the power of God's Spirit  
if we work with him.

So Paul finishes this section  
with the same thought - verse 13

*May the God of hope fill you  
with all joy and peace as you trust in him,  
so that you may overflow with hope  
by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

And that flowed from the context  
of the greatest promise  
already fulfilled for Paul's readers - verse 12

*the Root of Jesse will spring up  
one who will arise to rule over the nations  
the Gentiles will hope in him.*

Jesus has come - and the Roman Christians,  
mostly Gentiles - have indeed put their hope in him.

So on this particular issue  
what "truth" will you trust?

Paul is saying - look at the scriptures - they work.  
They give you love, joy, peace.,  
They give you the presence of God  
the grace of the Son,  
the power and unity of the Spirit.

Put your faith here -  
where you have already tested it.  
The same message as Micaiah ben Imlah!  
Did I tell the truth?  
Did it work?  
Mark my words!

What of us, then?

Sorry to keep harping back to this  
but it is so important.  
And the Second Sunday of Advent  
used to be Bible Sunday!

The teaching of the scriptures  
has been tested, and it works.  
It is the source of salvation, the key to grace.  
It is also the key to unlocking  
the power of the Spirit.  
And it is the key to knowing the presence and love  
of God the Father.

Also its moral teachings work  
and its promises come true.

Here we find these stories of the prophets  
and their message rings out loud and clear -  
God is good - the LORD, he is God.

Here we find the prophecies of the coming Messiah  
and they have been fulfilled, at Christmas.

Here we find clear teaching  
about God's nature, and his requirements.

Here we find the encouragement we need  
to build our faith  
and through that faith,  
we experience God for ourselves.

Here we find further warnings  
and further prophecies  
and we can trust them too - they are true -  
even when we cannot yet prove them.  
Because what we can test has proved trustworthy.

So listen to those who teach the truth.  
Listen to those who teach from God's word.

Be very wary of those who set the Bible aside  
or who seek to interpret it in novel ways  
to suit their new ideas or to support their "extras".

It is not my place to judge Bishops and Archbishops  
That's for higher authority.  
Here in Scripture we have higher authority  
than any purple cassock.

Don't be discouraged, don't be put off.

But don't be led by those whose leading  
does not have God's anointing.

Who are the true prophets?  
Those who teach the truth.

What is truth? "My word is truth" says the LORD.

And in what may be troubled times to come  
we may have to make these judgements.

All I am saying is - let God's word be the judge.

It has rescued the church before.

It will save the church again.

Remain faithful to it.

And it tells us to pray for our leaders  
both locally, and at the level of Kings!

Here is our unity  
here is our hope  
here is our truth.

It is God-given, and God-inspired.  
This is the Word of the LORD.

//

---