

The Gospel Witness

PUBLISHED WEEKLY

IN THE INTEREST OF JARVIS STREET BAPTIST
CHURCH, TORONTO, AND OF EVANGELICAL TRUTH

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PASTOR AND EDITOR

"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."—Romans 1: 16.

Address correspondence: The Gospel Witness, 130 Gerrard Street E., Toronto.

TORONTO, APRIL 12th, 1923.

Vol. 1.

(\$3.00 per year, postpaid, 5c. per copy.)

No. 48

The Jarvis Street Pulpit

THE SOUL'S WATERLOO.

A Sermon by the Pastor.

Preached in Jarvis St. Church, Toronto, Sunday Evening, October 15th, 1922.
(Stenographically reported.)

"And the battle increased that day: howbeit the king of Israel stayed himself up in his chariot against the Syrians until the even: and, about the time of the sun going down he died."—II Chronicles 18:34.

THE King of Israel referred to here was Ahab, of whom it is said, "There was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up." Ahab's whole career was one of open and flagrant rebellion against God. And there came a time when Jehoshaphat paid him a visit. And Ahab said unto his servants, "Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still, and take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria? And he said unto Jehoshaphat, Wilt thou go with me to battle to Ramoth-gilead? And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses." However, he counselled that inquiry should be made of the word of the Lord concerning this enterprise which Ahab had in prospect. Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said unto them, "Shall I go up 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." But Jehoshaphat was not satisfied; and he asked, "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we may enquire of him?" To which Ahab replied, "There is yet one man, Micaiah, the son of Imla, by whom we may enquire of the Lord: but I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." But Jehoshaphat's counsel prevailed, and Micaiah was sent for. The messenger who carried the king's request informed him that already four hundred prophets had promised the king prosperity, and advised that his word should be like the word of one of them. But Micaiah said, "As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak." And when at last he came to Ahab, and Ahab propounded to him the same question,

he gave him the same answer: "Go, and prosper: for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king. And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou say nothing but that which is true in the name of the Lord?" Yet he heard exactly the same message from Micaiah as he heard from the four hundred prophets. He did not question the four hundred prophets or the reliability of their testimony; but when Micaiah preached after the same fashion, he began to think there must be something wrong with Micaiah. Some preachers can tell men that human nature does not need redemption, but only development; and they are applauded; but if some other preachers were to say the same thing, people would say, "What has changed his testimony?" Why did Ahab not receive the same word, in the same unquestioned fashion, from Micaiah? Then, as now, it was the prophet's word which gave weight to his testimony. The faithful prophet, thus adjured, opened his mouth and delivered the word which the Lord had given to him. He told how in a vision he had seen "the host of heaven" in the presence of the Lord; and the Lord had asked, "Who shalt persuade Ahab that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?" And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner." And there came forth a spirit and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him. And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth and do so;" for after all, that is what Ahab had been asking for.

I reminded you this morning that "he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul." And if men will not have the truth, but a lie, God will let them have what they want at last. "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie." Ahab had shut his heart all his life against the truth; and at last God permitted him to have just what he had asked for—a lying spirit.

Remember, my hearers, you can shut your heart against the gospel too long: you can refuse to hear the truth until it shall be impossible for you to believe anything but a lie. Thus, at last, Micaiah said, "I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the Lord said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace." And Ahab turned to Jehosaphat and said, "Did I not tell thee that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil? I knew the kind of sermon we should hear if we went to hear that man preach. I knew that he would run counter to all my plans for to-morrow, and make it very difficult for me to go back to business, and do the thing I planned to do. I told you he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil."

"And the king of Israel said, Take Micaiah and carry him back . . . and say, Thus saith the king, put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace." And as they were leading Micaiah away, he called after the king his last message. He said, "If thou return at all in peace, the Lord hath not spoken by me." And when he had disposed of the preacher, he said to Jehosaphat, "I will disguise myself, and enter the battle; but put thou on thy robes. And the king of Israel disguised himself, and went into the battle." But Jehosaphat soon discovered that he was the centre of interest on the field of battle. The king of Syria had commanded his captains that they "fight neither with small nor great, save only with the king of Israel." And seeing Jehosaphat in royal apparel, they assumed he was the king; but when Jehosaphat cried out, they forsook him; but they did not find the king. Albeit, "A certain man drew a bow at a venture,

and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host; for I am wounded. And the battle increased that day: howbeit the king of Israel stayed himself up in his chariot against the Syrians until the even: and about the time of the sun going down he died."

That is a long story for an introduction; but I wanted you to have the historical setting of the text. Let me now speak to you of the Warrior, of the Battle, and of the Sunset.

I. First of all, I want you to ANALYZE THE CHARACTER OF THIS MAN AHAB, WHO WAS SET UPON HAVING WAR WITH GOD.

And I begin by saying that *the trouble with Ahab was that his heart was wrong*. The whole bias of his life was against the will of God. It was as natural for Ahab to do wrong, as it was for water to run down hill. "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." All his ambitions, all his aspirations, all the plans he made—the whole bent of his life was in opposition to the will of God. Hence, whenever the word of God came to him, it came with threatening, with condemnation; and he was reluctant to hear it.

And that is true of everyone of us! We are enemies in our minds by wicked works. You have only to study the life and character of the youngest child; and you will, if you are perfectly frank, become a theologian of the old school: at least, you will subscribe to the doctrine of natural depravity. There is a disposition in every one of us to go wrong. If you have been happy enough to discover a man, or woman, or boy, or girl, who is free from that tendency, whose life does not illustrate that great truth, you are an exception to the universal rule. The truth is, it is natural for us every one to do wrong.

And yet Ahab seems to have been *the victim of a besetting sin*. He was weaker in one part of his nature than he was in some other parts. The evil that was within expressed itself more clearly and more strongly in one direction than it did in some others. If you study his character you will find that *he was a covetous man*; he was always grasping after that which belonged to somebody else. He wanted Naboth's vineyard; and he resolved to have it even if he had to commit murder to get it. And now he determines to possess himself of Ramoth-gilead. He was a successful man. He had made up his mind to get things, and hitherto he had succeeded in the realization of his ambitions. He added land to land, field to field, territory to territory. Ahab was resolved to push back the boundaries of his kingdom, and to possess more and more of this world.

I do not know what your besetting sin may be. Sin expresses itself in one direction in one man, and in another, in another. But every man and woman here this evening knows that at one point his or her character is weaker than at any other point; and that at that very point sin is stronger than at any other. He knows that what is a temptation to other people is no temptation to him; and the things which seem to have no power over many others, threaten to destroy him. We are all different. Because you never get drunk, do not speak too harshly of the man who does: because you have a very mild tongue, do not commit the folly of supposing that you are so far superior to some man who sometimes offends with his lips. I do not know what it is, my friend; but there is a point in your life, if you are not a Christian, where sin is entrenched. There is a point where the powers of hell have established themselves; and that is the point where God is going to fight his last battle with you: that is the point where destiny is to be determined: just at that particular

place, God is going to decide at last who shall be Lord of your life. At that point you will surrender or be destroyed.

Ahab was a man who was very easily influenced. He was a weak character in some respects. He "sold himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up." Poor fellow! He is to be pitied! Some men said, "Perhaps Ahab would not be half so bad if it were not for Jezebel." It is too bad, is it not, that some men have such wives! And equally regrettable is it, that some wives have such husbands! But is it really true that Jezebel found it easy to influence Ahab? Read his story. Jezebel was like most other wives—she was wonderfully shrewd. She first of all discovered what Ahab wanted to do; and then she told him to do it! But you will search the record in vain to discover one single instance where Jezebel influenced him against his own will. The truth is, it is easy to roll a stone down hill; it is easy to influence a man in the direction of his own desires; it is easy to accelerate the processes of degeneration, and hasten a man's journey to the pit. He is going there anyhow—that is the direction in which he is moving; and that was the direction in which Jezebel influenced him.

It may be that there is somebody here who thinks to justify his or her course in steadfastly rejecting the offers of the gospel on that ground. "Sir, I wish I had a little more individuality; I wish I had a little more firmness of will; I wish I were not so easily influenced, for I go to church and find myself possessed of new desires; and I would like to go the upward path: then I go to business, or I go on the train, or I meet somebody in the hotel, and I find I am just carried away with the tide." Yes, because that is the way you are going, my friend; and that is the direction of your natural inclination. It will not do to try to lay the responsibility upon others. Observe: *Ahab was never easily influenced against his own desires.* Of all the characters whose history we have recorded in this Book, is there one more massive, more splendidly proportioned; or is there one who evidenced a stronger will, and a more forceful personality than Elijah the Tishbite? And yet Ahab could stand against Elijah like a rock: he could stand against Micaiah, the son of Imla, and be absolutely influenced: he could search all the dens and caves of the earth to find the prophets of the Lord, to destroy them. Ahab spent his whole life seeking to silence every voice that dared to tell him the truth. If Ahab had had his way he would have cut off the head of every prophet of Jehovah. Ahab set his heart upon living in a world where truth would never dare to speak. He loved a lie; he resolved to live a lie; and shut every avenue of his nature against the voice of God. His carnal mind was enmity against God.

What the Bible calls "sin" is a terrible thing. A man calls up the doctor, and he says, "I wish you would come over to see my wife. She is not very well." "Anything serious?" the doctor asks. "O no, I do not think so. She is just a little indisposed." And he comes. The family think there is nothing seriously wrong; but when the doctor examines the patient, he knows; he is filled with alarm. And if he were to tell what he knows, he would say, "I have discovered something that has baffled medical science through all the ages: I have discovered the advance agent of death; and all the wealth of the world, and all that human skill can do, cannot indefinitely postpone the coming of the last great conqueror. I hear his foot-step. And this woman is set toward the grave!" He tells the husband that it is serious; but he dismisses the doctor for telling him the truth. He insists that the doctor does not know anything; and he calls another:

Thus, people may play with this moral distemper and regard it as only a little human infirmity. I tell you that sin is a thing that has all the power of hell behind it. "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." Behold it working in Ahab, strengthening him against all the appeals of God Himself, until he resolves upon spiritual suicide.

II. NOW A WORD OR TWO ABOUT THE BATTLE! What was the battle about? What was the cause of the war? Ahab said, "Ramoath-gilead is ours. I will have it." And God said, "You shall not have it, Ahab." "I will," said Ahab. And God said, "Thou shalt not." Jehoshaphat, will you help me assemble the hosts? We will fight this thing out." What are you going to do Ahab? "I am going to cut a path through the Syrian host to the gate of Ramoth, and enter as a conqueror." What Micaiah really said—his message being interpreted—was this: "Ahab, you may cut your way through the Syrian host; but when you arrive at the gates of Ramoth you will find Another with a drawn sword in His hand Whom no man ever conquered; and you will fall before Him. Now be wise, do not attempt the impossible." "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker. Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands?"

Well, my friend, God is inseparable from His law; and *if you and I transgress His law, we fight against God Himself*. It may be in some great transaction—it may be in a matter of business involving millions, that some man will fight God; while others will fight out the battle over a five cent piece, perhaps. It makes no difference where it is; for wherever a man puts himself in opposition to the sovereign will of Omnipotence, he enters upon a course which will destroy him in the end. It may be that there is some man here this evening who is contemplating a certain course of action; and all he sees is the Syrians. It may be a matter of competition in business; he thinks if he can gain the advantage of somebody—the king of Syria, he has all his plans laid—if he gets that, he will get his Ramoth. You will do nothing of the kind, my friend, if God is in opposition to you: do not make any mistake about that. You may out-general, or out-fight the Syrians; but in the end of the day you will have to fight it out with God.

Do you not see the principle? Law is universal: God is one: there is no province of His illimitable dominions in which His law is not operative; and should any man lift his puny finger against the law of God, sooner or later God will deal with him. God brings us into judgment. Ahab was willing to concede, I dare say, many things if only he could have Ramoth-gilead. This covetous desire for the possession of that which belonged to somebody else—that was *luring* him on all the time; and it was on that very point that the last great conflict was fought.

The truth is, therefore, that we have not surrendered to God until we have surrendered altogether. It is of no use to surrender in one hundred particulars, and then to reserve one special province of the kingdom of mansoul over which we resolve to reign ourselves, and from which God is to be excluded. The battle will increase: "The battle increased that day." It will increase, it must increase! O no; God will never give up: there will be no surrender on His part: He never has surrendered—He never will! The battle will end only with the capitulation of the rebel.

AND WHAT ABOUT THE SUNSET? O how different was the evening hour from the promise of the morning! When Ahab had assembled his splendid fighting men, with all their implements of war; and when to that he added the chariots

and horses of Jehoshaphat; and when he had reviewed his army, he said, "I think there is every prospect of success. The king of Syria can not match my men." Therefore he resolved, "We will dispose of the preacher. We will get him out of the way. We will silence the voice that would discourage us. We will put him in prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I return in peace." He resolved to take every precaution. And to his ally, Jehoshaphat, he said, "Put on thy robes; and I will disguise myself. This prophet said that I should come again in peace: I will show him;" and so he disguised himself as though he were an ordinary captain of the host; and he entered into the battle.

There was not one of all the Syrian captains, nor of all the soldiers under them, who was able to identify Ahab. But remember! God had spoken; He had said, "Ahab, if you go, you will never return. I will show you the end of the day from the beginning: I saw all Israel scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd; and the Lord said, These have no master; let them return therefore every man to his house in peace. You are forewarned. Now if you will go there can be but one result. Your blood be upon your own head." But said Ahab, "I do not believe it. I will disguise myself, and will go to battle." And he did; and in the thick of the fight "a certain man drew a bow at a venture." And as he did so, an unseen Hand was laid upon the bow-string, and it was unerringly guided; and the bow man let it fly. And the king who was disguised said to the driver of his chariot, "Turn thine hand, that thou mayest carry me out of the host; for I am wounded." He had found him out! There is no disguise that can effectually hide a sinner from God. There is no way by which a man may lose himself in the battle against righteousness. "Be sure your sin will find you out."

It may be that some here are doing the very thing that Ahab did—*hiding behind a servant of God who had got into bad company*; for Jehoshaphat made the mistake of his life when he "joined affinity with Ahab;" and he had to suffer for it. Jehoshaphat was a servant of the Lord; but he had no business to be fighting in the same battle. And sometimes it is true that professing Christians go into the battle side by side with Ahab, with all their robes on; and Ahab—brave man that he is—loves to hide behind the Jehoshaphats!

A man says, "O well, I may be a bit of a sinner; but I am no bigger sinner than lots of your church members; for they are doing the same things that I am doing. I have one in partnership with me; and he knows the business we are doing." Yes, alas! alas! Jehoshaphat and Ahab are fighting in the same battle; and they resolved upon the possession of the same prize! "Why talk to me? Why do you not talk to Jehoshaphat?" That did not save Ahab. God will reckon with Jehoshaphat; and God will reckon with every man who is "unequally yoked together with unbelievers." They must answer for themselves. He will deal with Jehoshaphat for putting on his robes, and entering into the battle. But meantime, we are talking about Ahab. Let me remind you no one can be justified by another's sins, but only by Another's righteousness. The bow drawn at a venture will find the joint in the armour of every soul fighting against God irrespective of his companionships. Make no mistake about that!

And then Ahab said, "Turn thine hand that thou mayest carry me out of the host." I spoke to you a few Sunday evenings ago about Esau who "found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears." Ahab began to repent; and yet he "stayed himself up in his chariot against the Syrians." He said, "I will see this thing through. I said I would have Ramoth-gilead, and Ramoth-gilead I will have." And so he propped himself up, while the blood was streaming from his gaping wounds, until the evening.

I saw a man do that once. He was a miser. I do not know that he had very much money—perhaps a few thousand dollars—but he had lived the life of a miser. He had been cruel to his wife; and even more cruel to his children. His wife, when I knew him, was dead; and his children, all but one faithful daughter, had been driven from him. He lived in a house upon whose floors there were no carpets: there was no comfort within at all. It was just a place to keep off the rain. And he was also making money—just like Ahab. He was a shrewd man; and he was piling up his money. At last

he was taken ill; and this faithful daughter, who was a Christian girl, who in spite of all his unkindness had remained at her father's side, asked me to go and see him; and I went to see him in that cheerless home: a prison-cell might be more comfortable than the room in which he lay. He was very ill; and he thought he was going to die. He did die,—in fact, it was his death-bed. He believed it to be so. I talked to him about Christ; and he was full of anxiety for the future, deeply concerned. He wanted to know the way of life, for he was terrified at the prospect of death.

I visited him again and again; and the daughter sent a telegram to one of her brothers who was not so very far away. He came home: a fine young fellow he was—a man who seemed almost to despise his father's property. He did not want any of it, I am sure of that. Just at the head of the bed where I sat talking to the father, who was hard of hearing, there was a door opening into another room. The son opened that door, and said to me in a whisper, "Make sure, Mr. Shields, that he is sincere. Ask him what he would do with his property if God should spare his life." So presently I turned to him, and said, "Mr. So-and-so, the doctor says you are going to die; and it looks as though you were. But sometimes, you know, people do not die when they are expected to. And it is barely possible that God may spare your life—and what if He did?" A moment before he had been speaking as though he were deeply contrite, and profoundly penitent. I said to him, "What if God should restore you? What about the past, Mr. So-and-so? What about the property you have accumulated? You have bound it to yourself; and you have shared it with no other, not even with your wife and children. Would you continue in that course if God should spare you? And with his remaining strength he propped himself up and began to swear; fire flashed from his eye; he cursed his daughter—the faithful girl who had sacrificed the best years of her life for him; he cursed the son; he cursed everybody; and seemed as though he were possessed with a legion of devils. And in a paroxysm of anger, at last he fell back on his pillow. I could do nothing with him; and even then I remember I thought of this story. "The king of Israel stayed himself up in his chariot against the Syrians until the even,"—propping himself up that he might breathe his last breath in defiance against God! Sin drives men mad! It blinds them so that they drive right on over the precipice to destruction.

"And about the time of the sun going down he died." And they took his chariot down to the pool of Samaria; and they washed the royal blood from the floor of the chariot. And as they did so "dogs licked up his blood; and they washed his armour, according unto the word of the Lord which he spake."

Thus when the sun went down, God had His way! He always has His way! God was victorious; His Word was fulfilled. Ahab had gone down to defeat in a battle against Omnipotence. Every man does—every woman does; and the only wisdom is to turn away from it all and surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Until we were singing the last verse of that hymn, I expected to speak to you on something else. May I remind you before I close that Ahab was terribly deluded. When he fought against God, Whom he ought to have loved, he rebelled against One Whom it ought to have been his joy to serve. And if you would know what God is, what God is like—you must see Him in the face of Jesus Christ. The little children came to Him, and He gathered them up in His arms and blessed them: the sick people came, and He gently laid His gracious hand upon them and made them whole: the troubled came, and gracious words proceeded out of His mouth. He ever "went about doing good." And at last, because there was no other way, because He saw what our sin was doing, He Himself took our place, and went to the cross, and bore our sins in His own body on the tree. He died our death for us that we through simple faith in Him might have everlasting life.

O that the spirit of God may make us wise, this evening, unto salvation; to choose life rather than death; Christ rather than Barabbas; heaven rather than hell! "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already." May God save you every one!

CHURCH NEWS.

The following telegram has been received from Dr. Stratton of Calvary Baptist Church, New York, with whom our Pastor is associated at the present time in a ten days' evangelistic mission: "Great beginning yesterday; crowds large; deep earnestness among Christians; mighty outpouring of Holy Spirit; evening service (Sunday) fifteen professions; many re-consecrations; all indications point to a real scriptural revival. Join us in 2nd Chronicles 7:14. Our prayers go up for work there; memories of my joyful season of service with you revived by presence of your beloved Pastor, and his helpful ministry here."

During the Pastor's absence we venture to copy the following article from THE WATCHMAN EXAMINER, a weekly Denominational paper edited by Dr. Curtis Lee Laws, New York: "Dr. T. T. Shields, Pastor of Jarvis St. Church, Toronto, Canada, whose picture appears on our front page, will assist Dr. John Roach Stratton, of Calvary Church, in a series of evangelistic meetings, beginning April 8 and closing April 22. Dr. Shields is widely known as a brilliant preacher and a faithful expositor of God's Word. Recently Dr. George W. Truett, of Dallas, Texas, himself a preacher of extraordinary ability, declared to the editor of this paper that in his opinion there are few men in the English-speaking world who are the equal of Dr. Shields as a preacher. Dr. Truett was associated with Dr. Shields in Young Men's Christian Association work at the battle fronts in Europe during the war. This series of evangelistic meetings at Calvary church will afford the Baptists of New York and vicinity an opportunity of hearing this distinguished Canadian minister. Our readers everywhere are asked to pray God's blessing upon this effort in the midst of the great metropolis to win lost men to Christ."

The April Open Meeting of the Women's Home Mission Board will be held on April 19 in the Sunday School Hall of Walmer Road Church. It is Young Women's night! Supper will be served free to all at 6.00 p.m. The programme will consist of a Conference on Young Women's work, addresses by good speakers, new lantern slides of our Western Work and an Intercession hour. All women of the Mission Circles are expected. All members of Young Women's Circles and all members of the older organized Bible Classes will be warmly welcomed.

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The Church Calendar

Sunday. For the week beginning Sunday, April 15th, 1923.

10.00—Prayer Service in the Church Parlor, Mr. George Greenway.

10.30—Communion Service.

11.00—Public Worship. Rev. T. T. Shields will preach.

3.00—The Bible School will meet.

6.00—Prayer Meeting in Church Parlor.

7.00—Public Worship. Rev. T. T. Shields will preach.

Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday—8.00—Prayer Service.

Wednesday—Junior Mid-Week Service—7.15.

The Parliament St. Branch, 250 Parliament St. Sunday: Bible School, 3.00;

Evangelistic Service, conducted by Mr. W. L. McKay, 7.00.

Wednesday, 8.00, Prayer Meeting. Friday, 7.15, Junior Service.