

2 Chronicles 18:14-22 // Pulling back the curtain

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[0:00] Chapter 18, starting from verse 1 all the way to verse 22, which can be found on page 449 on the church bibles.

! Page 449, Chronicles 18, starting at verse 1. Jehoshaphat had great wealth and honour, and he allied himself with Ahab by marriage.

Some years later he went down to see Ahab in Samaria. Ahab slaughtered many sheep and cattle for him and the people with him, and urged him to attack Ramoth-Gilead.

Ahab, king of Israel, asked Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, Will you go with me against Ramoth-Gilead? Jehoshaphat replied, I am as you are, and my people as your people.

We will join you in the war. But Jehoshaphat also said to the king of Israel, First seek counsel of the Lord. So the king of Israel brought together the prophets, four hundred men, and asked them, Shall we go to war against Ramoth-Gilead, or shall I not?

[1:17] Go, they answered, for God will give it into the king's hands. But Jehoshaphat asked, But Jehoshaphat asked, Is there is no longer a prophet of the Lord here whom we can inquire of?

The king of Israel answered Jehoshaphat, There is still one prophet through whom we can inquire of the Lord, But I hate him, because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad. He is Micaiah, son of Imlah. The king should not say such a thing, Jehoshaphat replied. So the king of Israel called one of his officials and said, Bring Micaiah, son of Imlah, at once.

Dressed in their royal robes, the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, were sitting on their thrones at the threshing floor by the entrance of the gate of Samaria, with all the prophets prophesying before them.

Now Zedekiah, son of Cana, had made iron horns, and he declared, This is what the Lord says, With these you shall gore the Arameans until they are destroyed.

[2:29] All the other prophets were prophesying the same thing. Attack Ramoth-Galid and be victorious, they said, For the Lord will give it into the king's hands.

The messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah said to him, Look, the other prophets without exception are predicting success for the king. Let your word agree with theirs and speak favourably.

But Micaiah said, As surely as the Lord lives, I can only tell him what my God says. When he arrived, the king asked him, Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth-Galid, or shall I not?

Attack and be victorious, he answered, For they will be given into your hands. The king said to him, How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?

Then Micaiah answered, I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd. And the Lord said, These people have no master. Let each one go home in peace.

[3:37] The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, Didn't I tell you that he never prophesies anything good about me, but only bad? Micaiah continued, Therefore, hear the word of the Lord.

I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, With all the multitudes of heaven standing on his right and on his left. And the Lord said, Who will entice Ahab, king of Israel, into attacking Ramoth-Galid, And going to his death there?

One suggested this and another that. Finally, a spirit came forward, stood before the Lord and said, I will entice him. By what means?

The Lord asked. I will go and be a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all his prophets, he said. You will succeed in enticing him, said the Lord. Go and do it.

So now the Lord has put a deceiving spirit in the mouths of these prophets of yours. The Lord has decreed disaster for you. This is the word of the Lord.

[4:49] Thank you, Rona, and brilliant to see you all. Let's join together in prayer as we come to God's word. Heavenly Father, as Micaiah resolved to speak only what you said, Help me to speak

only what you would have me speak to all of us here this evening.

Give me words that are faithful to your word. And give us all hearts ready to receive it. By your spirit, work through your words in us today.

Exposing what is false. Strengthening what is weak. And drawing us to the Lord Jesus Christ. For we ask in his name.

Amen. Well, blink and you miss him. Micaiah appears. He is faithful.

And then he disappears from the story. And perhaps that is not such a bad picture of the Christian life. As someone once put it, You're only dancing on this earth for a short while.

[6:02] Most of us will live and die without ever making the history books. And that's okay.

Because if you belong to Jesus, The thing that matters most about your life is not whether you are famous, But whether you are faithful.

And that's what we're exploring in this three-part mini-series on Micaiah. How do we live faithfully in an unfaithful world? And if you weren't here last week and you're wondering what on earth Micaiah has to do with the Mandalorian, Then the answer is not much.

But both our spin-off series and both Micaiah and the Mandalorian begin with the letter M. Last week we saw that faithfulness begins before the moment of testing.

Micaiah had settled beforehand who he would obey. But what happens when he actually stands before Ahab? What does faithfulness look like when the pressure is real?

Well this passage shows us two things. Two things that we need to see if we're going to stand firm. We need to see firstly what is happening inside us.

[7:27] And then secondly we need to see what is happening above us. Because our hearts can deceive us about what is true. And the world that we see with our eyes is not the whole reality.

And in this passage God gives us both. First he exposes the human heart. And then he pulls back the curtain on heaven.

So first we're going to be thinking about the human heart exposed in verses 14 to 17. Now I think there's something deeply revealing about what happens when Micaiah finally comes before Ahab. Remember what Micaiah has just resolved in front of a messenger. Verse 13. As surely as the Lord lives I can tell him only what my God says.

And now he stands before the king. Verse 14. Ahab asks him Micaiah shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead or shall I not? Notice exactly the same question he asked the 400 prophets back in verse 5.

[8:40] And Micaiah replies, Attack and be victorious for they will be given into your hand. Now hang on. What's happened to Micaiah?

Has he bottled it? Has he walked into the room and seen the two kings and the 400 prophets and thought, Actually, perhaps I better keep my head down. No. Micaiah has a sense of humour.

Micaiah is being sarcastic. And Ahab knows it. That's the really fascinating thing. Look at Ahab's response. How many times must I make you to swear to tell me the truth and nothing but the truth? How does Ahab know that Micaiah isn't being serious? Well, there's clearly some history between them.

Ahab knows Micaiah well enough to recognise when he's telling him what he wants to hear. It's almost as though he can read them. Oh yes, absolutely, your majesty. You go ahead and triumph. Everything will be just fine.

[9:45] Nothing to worry about. Yes sir, yes sir. Three bags full sir. And Ahab knows that's not what Micaiah really thinks. And notice the extraordinary thing about that.

At some level, Ahab already knows. He knows these prophets. These 400 prophets are telling him what he wants to hear, not what God wants him to hear.

And yet he still goes. That is the corruption of the human heart. Sin doesn't simply make us ignorant. Sometimes the problem is much more frightening than that.

We can know the truth. We can know the truth and still refuse it. We can know what God says and then find reasons why it doesn't apply to us.

We can tell ourselves a story in which our desires become reasonable, our disobedience becomes almost unavoidable, and God's word becomes the unreasonable thing. And that I think is what makes Ahab so frightening.

[10:50] He isn't a man who's never heard God's words. He's a man who has heard it again and again. And he's become extraordinarily skilled at living as though it weren't true.

And so then Micaiah tells him what he sees. Verse 16. I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd.

And the Lord said, these people have no master. Let each one go home in peace. Now this is a devastating picture. A king who should shepherd God's people has instead scattered them.

And there's also a terrible irony here. These people will only have peace when this shepherd is dead and gone. Better no king than this king.

And so it should also make us long for a better shepherd. And centuries later another man will look upon the crowds and see them like sheep without a shepherd.

[12:00] But unlike Ahab, Jesus will not scatter the sheep. He will lay down his life for the sheep. But Ahab isn't finished.

He turns to Jehoshaphat and says, Didn't I tell you that he never prophesies anything good about me but only bad? And there is again, Ahab knows Micaiah is God's prophet.

He knows what Micaiah says is bad news precisely because it is the truth. And yet he has already decided that he doesn't want it. Ahab knows the truth.

But Ahab doesn't like the truth. And that is where this passage searches us. Because Ahab is an extreme example.

But look at Jehoshaphat. Isn't his psychology fascinating? In some ways I think Jehoshaphat is much harder to understand than Ahab.

[13:02] Jehoshaphat isn't Ahab. He genuinely seeks the Lord. In fact, he is the one who says, Is there no longer a prophet of the Lord here through whom we can inquire?

He wants to hear God's word. And then God's word comes and what does he do? He goes to war anyway. He ignores God's word. Isn't that extraordinary?

He asks God what he should do. God tells him. And he still does what he'd already planned to do. And so perhaps that is actually more searching for most of us than Ahab.

Because perhaps you've never been tempted to say, I really don't care what God says. But have you ever heard God's word?

And then found a way to explain why in this particular situation or another, that it doesn't really apply to you. Have you ever wanted something so badly that you become remarkably creative at finding reasons why it must be God's will?

[14:10] Have you ever made up your mind and then gone looking for loopholes or biblical reasons to support your desire? The human heart is extraordinarily good at this.

And so if we are to remain faithful in an unfaithful world, we need to begin here. We need to let God's word expose us rather than twisting God's word to excuse us.

We need to be willing to pray, Lord, search me. Search my heart. When I'm rationalizing sin, Lord, expose me. When I'm resisting your word, show me.

When I'm bending the truth to fit my desires, bring me back. And when I'm seeking to be obedient, Lord, on the other hand, strengthen me.

And brothers and sisters, we can pray that prayer with confidence because the Christian isn't left alone with a deceptive heart.

[15:15] God has given us his word, the Bible, and he's given us his spirit who illuminates that word and searches our hearts. So we don't need to become paralyzed wondering whether every conviction we have is self-deception.

We need to become teachable. We need to become teachable. People who want God's word to tell us the truth about ourselves, even when that truth is sometimes uncomfortable to hear.

Because if we want to be faithful in an unfaithful world, we need to recognize that the enemy is not only out there, there is a capacity for self-deception in here.

But there is another side to this. And I think that this is one of the reasons that Micaiah can stand so boldly in front of King Ahab. Micaiah knows his man.

He knows that even in this hardened, wicked king, there is a conscience. Yes, it is distorted. Yes, it is suppressed. Yes, it repeatedly resists the truth.

[16:20] But it is there. Ahab, he isn't a machine that's programmed to reject God. He's a human being who knows more than he perhaps cares to admit.

I think that should give us courage when we speak about Jesus. Because perhaps you have someone in mind. A difficult boss perhaps.

A staunchly atheist friend. A family member. Someone who seems completely and resolutely against Jesus. Perhaps they've laughed at your faith or shut you down. Perhaps you've tried before with them and it's felt as though your words have bounced off them. This passage says, Don't despair. Don't assume that because someone is hostile to the gospel that they have no awareness of its truth at all.

Even Ahab has a conscience. So we don't need to manipulate people. We don't need to come up with clever strategies. We don't need to win arguments by sheer force of personality.

[17 : 27] We simply need, like Micaiah, to be faithful. To speak the truth in love. Trust God with the conscience and leave the results to him.

Because if we're going to be faithful in an unfaithful world, we need to see both these things clearly. The capacity of our own hearts to deceive us.

And the capacity of even the hardest heart to be confronted by God's truth. And now Micaiah is going to show us something else. Because so far we've been looking inside the human heart. Now Micaiah is going to show us what's happening above. Now there is more that's going on here than meets the eye. The curtain is pulled back and God gives Micaiah a glimpse of what is happening at the events taking place on that threshing floor.

Listen to what he says. Therefore, hear the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting on his throne.

[18 : 41] With all the multitudes of heaven standing on my right and on my left. I saw the Lord sitting on his throne. What an extraordinary thing.

An extraordinary thing to experience. Remember where Micaiah is standing. He's standing before two kings.

Sitting on their thrones dressed in royal robes. And there are 400 prophets prophesying before them. That is the visible reality.

But Micaiah sees something else. Micaiah sees another throne. And it is the throne that really matters.

There is a higher throne. There is a greater king. Yes, the two kings on that threshing floor look impressive. Yes, the 400 prophets look impressive. Yes, the political power, the cultural consensus, religious establishment.

[19 : 42] Yes, it all looks impressive. But Micaiah has been given a glimpse of reality from heaven's perspective. And suddenly the two kings and 400 prophets don't seem all that intimidating to him anymore.

And this explains something about Micaiah. Where does this man get the courage to stand there and say what nobody wants to hear?

Is he naturally fearless? Is he some kind of extraordinary personality that actually just doesn't care what other people think about him?

No. He sees the throne. He sees the throne of God. He sees that there is a higher throne.

And so if I may put it like this. Micaiah has a different audience in that room on the threshing floor. Ahab thinks that Micaiah is speaking to him.

[20 : 41] But Micaiah knows that ultimately he is speaking before the living God. And that changes everything. And the choice between saying what this king Ahab wants to hear and saying what the higher king tells him to say.

It's a no brainer. Micaiah knows which king he must obey. And this friends is the conviction that we all must have.

You and I will not walk in the courageous footsteps of Micaiah unless with the eyes of faith we see this higher throne.

Because by nature we see what's immediately in front of us. We see the stranger who might laugh in our face.

The colleague who might think less of us. We see the daunting situation ahead. The culture around us with all its self-confidence and sophistication.

[21 : 47] The 400 voices saying the same thing. And if that is all we see. Then of course we'll be intimidated.

Of course we will. Of course we'll be tempted to keep quiet about Jesus. But Micaiah sees something else.

There is a higher throne. That's why Jesus says to his disciples. Don't be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.

He's basically teaching his disciples to see what Micaiah saw. Don't let the visible become the measure of reality. Don't let the people standing in front of you become bigger in your mind than the God who stands above them.

See the higher throne. There's a throne above the throne. And there's also a battle behind the battle.

[22:48] Now during the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The Iraqi information minister, Muhammad Said Al-Shahif. Became something of an accidental comic figure.

At least in some parts of the Western media. And every day the man dubbed Baghdad Bob would appear on the news. And make statements that were wildly at odds with reality.

Explaining how brilliantly the Iraqi troops were doing. And on one infamous occasion. He's there, Baghdad Bob, standing on a rooftop in Baghdad.

Telling the world that the Americans are nowhere to be seen. Baghdad is safe. And behind them you see Iraqi troops running and diving for cover. As an American Abrams tank rumbles into view. It's almost like a pantomime. Look behind you. Well there was Baghdad Bob's version of reality. And then there was reality.

[23:52] And the gap between the two had become enormous. But Micaiah is about to show us something far more extraordinary.

Because the visible scene on that threshing floor is not the whole story. Micaiah has shown us the throne. Now he shows us something of what is happening around the throne.

Micaiah hears the Lord ask, Who will entice Ahab, king of Israel, into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there?

And then comes this extraordinary picture of the heavenly realm. One suggests one thing. Another suggests another. Then a spirit comes forward. I will entice him.

And the Lord asks, By what means? And the spirit answers, I will go and be a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all his prophets. And the Lord says, You will succeed in enticing him.

[24:53] And we have to stop here. Because this, let's face it, is deeply strange. What on earth are we being shown? Well first, again we're being shown that there is a spiritual reality behind the physical reality that we can see.

The battle over Ramoth Gilead is not simply a geopolitical struggle. There is a spiritual realm. There are spiritual beings. There is spiritual evil.

And yet, and this is the thing that we really must not miss. None of this is outside the sovereign control and rule of God.

Even here, God is on the throne. And there is another fascinating insight into Ahab. Remember back in verse 2, Ahab urges Jehoshaphat to go with him.

He urges him. That's the same word in the original being used here in verse 19 for the spirit's attempt to entice Ahab. To persuade him. To seduce him almost.

[26:02] To draw him alone. Ahab, you see, thinks that he's the clever one. He thinks he's the one who's manipulating the situation. Urging Jehoshaphat to do his dirty work.

But now the curtain is drawn back. The manipulator is being manipulated himself. The arch manipulator Ahab.

He's the one who's being manipulated. You see, Ahab thinks he can outmaneuver even God. And let's notice how far that self-delusion goes.

Ahab knows what Micaiah has said. That he will die at Ramoth Gilead. And yet he has the audacity to go into battle anyway. As we'll find out next week.

In disguise. As though he can somehow find a way around the word of God. But you cannot outwit the king who sits on the throne.

[27:04] Neither Ahab nor the spiritual powers at work in this scene are ultimately in control. There is a throne above them. All the Lord is sitting on the throne.

Now that raises a very difficult question. The spirit says, I will be a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all his prophets. And God says, you will succeed.

How are we to understand that? Now we need to be careful here. This passage is not suggesting for a minute that God is the author of evil.

Those prophets are responsible for their lies. The spirit is responsible for his deceiving.

King Ahab is responsible for his sin. Ahab is not an innocent victim who has been tricked into rejecting God.

[28:07] He has already heard the truth. He knows Micaiah is God's prophet. He knows that what he wants to hear is not what he ought to hear. And yet he persists. God is not taking an innocent man and tricking him into sin.

He is judging a guilty man who has repeatedly resisted the truth he knows. Deception is real. The evil is real.

Human responsibility is real. And yet God's sovereign purposes in all this is also real. The Lord here has decreed that King Ahab will go to Ramoth Gilead and die.

But let's notice something else. God isn't hiding the truth from Ahab. He's putting the truth before him again. You see, if God's purpose was simply to deceive Ahab, it would be a funny way of going about it, wouldn't it?

Why send a prophet to tell him that the other prophets are deceiving him? If anything, I think he's been given an off-ramp. And Ahab drives straight past it.

[29:27] Ahab isn't innocent. Let's not kid ourselves here. He is a guilty man who has heard the truth and rejected it. And that's why the language Paul uses in Romans chapter 1 is so helpful.

He speaks about people who suppress the truth. You see, Ahab's problem isn't that the truth never reached him. His problem is that he doesn't want the truth to rule him.

And God's judgment is to give him over to the path he has chosen. That's sobering. But notice what Micaiah has seen again.

He sees what Ahab cannot see. He sees above the earthly throne room, there is a heavenly throne room. Behind the visible battle, there is a spiritual battle.

And behind the apparent chaos, there is the sovereign purpose of God, who's bringing all things together for the good of those who love him. That is why Micaiah can stand.

[30:34] That is why he can speak. That is why Micaiah can be faithful. Because the reality he can see with his eyes is not the whole reality.

Now when we're thinking about this in relation to our own lives, there will be times, of course, when the culture around us seems overwhelmingly confident.

When everyone seems to agree. When those opposing your faith seem powerful, sophisticated, completely self-assured that they are right. And at those moments, remember what Micaiah saw. There is a throne above every throne. There is a king above every other king. Nothing, not even the spiritual powers that work in this world, is outside his sovereign control.

We see this most clearly in the Bible at the cross. Jesus knew exactly what was coming. He knew the hostility of the crowds. He knew the power of the religious authorities.

[31:42] He knew what Pilate's throne represented. And yet, Jesus stood firm. Why? Because Pilate's throne was not the highest throne.

Jesus went willingly to the cross. And there, human beings lied. They betrayed. They twisted justice. They condemned the innocent Son of God.

What they did was genuinely evil. For which they are responsible. And yet, Peter says, Jesus was handed over by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge.

The worst thing human beings ever did became the very means by which God accomplished the greatest salvation the world has ever known.

There is a reality behind reality. And above it all, there is a throne. And the Lord sits on the throne. So when faithfulness feels costly in your life.

[32:57] When the voices around you seem overwhelming. When you cannot understand what God is doing. Look up. See the Lord sitting on his throne.

See what Micaiah saw. The world that you can see with your eyes is not the whole world. The powers you can see are not the ultimate powers. The voices you can see here are not the final word.

And the king who sits on the throne is the one we serve. And perhaps that's what the Lord means to impress on us most from this passage in 2 Chronicles.

Our hearts are not reliable interpreters of reality always. And our eyes are not reliable interpreters of reality always.

Our hearts can deceive us about what is true. And our eyes can deceive us about what is important. So we need God's word to expose what is happening within us.

[34:03] And we need God's revelation to show us what is happening above us. We need to look inward with honesty. And we need to look upward with faith.

And when we do, we can stand where Micaiah stood. We can live faithfully in an unfaithful world. Because the truth isn't ultimately determined by the loudest voices around us. And reality isn't determined by what we can see in front of us. And that's worth us remembering. Because as the song puts it, you're only dancing on this earth for a short while.

Kings will come and go. Voices will rise and fall. The cultural consensus will change. But the king sitting on the throne remains the same.

[35 : 05] So living God, help us to be faithful in this unfaithful world. Help us to resolve now to be faithful in the different situations that we will face this week and in the weeks ahead.

Lord God, be our vision. Be the Lord of our hearts. Give us by faith a very real sense of your presence and the reality that you are on the throne.

That you are in absolute control. Working out your purposes for the good of those who love you. And would you be at work within us by your Holy Spirit.

Searching our hearts. Exposing our motives and desires. And conforming us to your will. And then, living God, would you embolden us to speak the truth about Jesus.

And proclaim the hope that we have in him to those around us. Make us faithful servants of our faithful king.

[36 : 10] For we ask all this in his name. Amen.