

2 Chronicles 18:1-13 // Before the Test

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[0:00] Tonight we're in 2 Chronicles chapter 18, which is on page 449 in the Church Bibles. I'll give you a moment to open that up. Page 449.

2 Chronicles chapter 18, beginning at verse 1. Now, Jehoshaphat had great wealth and honor, 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 the counsel of the Lord. So the king of Israel brought together the prophets, 400 men, and asked them, Shall we go to war against Ramoth-Gilead, or shall I not?

[1:26] Go, they answered, for God will give it into the king's hand. But Jehoshaphat asked, Is there 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 Imla. 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 Imla, 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 Canaan, had made iron horns, and he declared, This is what the Lord says. With these you will gore the Arameans until they are destroyed.

[2:35] All the other prophets were prophesying the same thing. Attack Ramoth-Gilead and be victorious, they said, for the Lord will give it into the king's hand. 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 tell him only what my God says.

This is the word of the Lord. Excellent. Thanks so much, Rob, for reading. And it's brilliant to see you all.

Do keep your Bibles open at the chapter, chapter 18. And let's join together in prayer as we come before the Lord. Father, as surely as you live, may what we hear tonight be true to your word.

Speak to us by your Holy Spirit. Strengthen and equip us, embolden us, and envision us for your purposes. Make us faithful to you, whatever the cost.

[3:59] Amen. Well, every successful franchise these days seems to have its own spin-off. And sometimes the side character actually has more depth than people might expect.

Now, the Mandalorian is a good example of that. He starts off as a kind of relatively obscure figure in the Star Wars universe. And then suddenly he's got his own spin-off series.

Well, tonight we're doing something similar. Let me introduce you to Micaiah, the forgotten prophet. You can think Boba Fett without the moral ambiguity. Now, if you've been with us on Sunday mornings before the summer, you'll know that we've been following the main storyline through the book of Kings.

But for the next three Sunday evenings, we're going to take a little bit of a detour. We're going to follow this almost forgotten character who only briefly appears in the story, but whose few words teach us something enormously important about what it means to be faithful to God in an unfaithful

world.

[5:15] Because most of us will never stand before kings. None of us are Old Testament prophets, but every Christian knows something about pressure.

The pressure to fit in. The pressure to keep quiet. The pressure to soften what we believe, perhaps. The pressure simply to go along with everyone else.

And there's something deep within us that makes that pressure, that kind of pressure, surprisingly powerful. And psychologists have demonstrated this in experiments on group pressure and conformity.

And people can be shown something as obvious as which of several lines matches another. And on their own, left to their own, almost everyone gets it right.

But putting them in a room with a group of people deliberately giving the wrong answer, and remarkably often, about 75% of the time or something like that, people go along with the crowd.

[6:22] Now here's the interesting bit. It's not because they can't see the answer. It's because they don't want to be the one person in the room who says, Actually, I don't think you all are right.

And there's something deep within us that wants to conform, that needs to conform. And whenever everyone around us is confidently saying the same thing, it can be surprisingly difficult to stand alone.

Which brings us to Micaiah. He is about to walk into a situation where the pressure to conform is immense. And the question is simple.

Will he go along with the crowd? Will he cave? Or will he remain faithful to God? That's what we're going to see tonight. So firstly, the pressure to conform in a world that rewards compromise.

Before Micaiah says a single word, before he even appears on stage, the writer wants us to feel the weight of the world that he's about to walk into.

[7:31] Because Micaiah isn't walking into a neutral situation. He's walking into a place where compromise looks entirely reasonable.

Where going against the crowd would not only seem unpopular, but foolish. So let's walk through the scene. We meet two kings in verse 1.

Jehoshaphat had great wealth and honor. And he allied himself with Ahab by marriage. And some years later, he goes down to Samaria. And Ahab rolls out the red carpet.

There's an extravagant feast. There's roast lamb. There's roast beef. There's hospitality on a grand scale. And then comes the proposal. Will you go with me against Ramoth Gilead?

Now at face value, this all looks rather encouraging. After years of division between the north and the south, here are God's people finally standing together.

[8:28] An alliance has been formed. A family marriage has cemented the relationship. We're going to work together to recover territory that belonged to God's people. You can almost imagine everyone around the table thinking, yes, seems obvious.

Why wouldn't we go ahead and recapture Ramoth Gilead? Well, that's often how compromise begins. Not with something necessarily obviously wicked.

It usually begins with something that seems plausible. A relationship, perhaps. A career move. A decision that on the face of it, in the world's eyes at least, makes perfect sense.

Compromise rarely announces itself as compromise. It often arrives dressed as common sense. But Jehoshaphat hesitates.

Hold your horses. Before we do anything, shouldn't we ask the Lord? Verse 4, he says, First seek the counsel of the Lord. It's the right question. What does God say about this?

[9:35] And now Ahab has a problem. The trouble is, Ahab doesn't particularly want to hear what the Lord has to say. He just wants the Lord's endorsement.

He kind of wants heaven to rubber stamp a decision that he's already arrived at. So he gathers 400 prophets. Now let's just pause there because 400 is a bit of a significant number here.

If you've been with us in our series on Kings before the summer, that number ought to make you a little bit uneasy. The last time Ahab assembled a group of prophets, it was the 450 prophets of Baal, who were standing against Elijah at Mount Carmel.

And precisely 400 prophets had previously belonged to his evil wife Jezebel and her dodgy religious establishment. So before a word has even been spoken, alarm bells are beginning to ring.

Ahab asks, Shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead or shall I not? And immediately the answer comes back, Go! For God will give it into the king's hand.

[10:43] One voice, one message, no hesitation, no disagreement, no awkward questions. Now just imagine that scene. 400 respected establishment figures all saying exactly the same thing.

It's rather impressive, rather intimidating, isn't it? Imagine walking into a room where every expert agrees. Every headline points in the same direction.

Every influential voice says, Well, obviously this is the way things are. Or think about some of the great moral questions of our own day.

You can find yourself in a conversation where nobody even feels the need to argue about the prevailing views. On sexuality.

On identity. On what makes for a good life. It's simply assumed. Everybody knows. Everybody agrees.

[11:41] That's the atmosphere here. 400 voices. One conclusion. That's kind of powerful.

Because after a while, you begin to wonder, Have I missed something?

Am I the one who's got it wrong? Surely all these people can't have got it wrong. And that's one of the oldest pressures that God's people face.

Sometimes the pressure isn't persecution. Sometimes it's consensus. The pressure of feeling that you're the only person who sees things differently.

But Jehoshaphat, he isn't convinced. Something doesn't sit right with him. It's all a little bit just too neat. All a little bit too easy. So he asks another question in verse 6.

Is there no longer a prophet of the Lord here? Who we can inquire of. And the inference is that the other prophets are definitely not of the Lord. Well, listen carefully to Ahab's answer.

[12:46] There is still one man, but I hate him. Why does Ahab hate him? Not because he's inaccurate. Not because he's unreliable.

Ahab tells us exactly why. I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad. What an astonishing admission.

Ahab doesn't want truth. Ahab wants affirmation. He isn't looking for someone to tell him what God says. He's looking for someone to tell him what he wants to hear.

And if we're honest, that temptation isn't unique to Ahab. We can all prefer voices that reassure us rather than challenge us.

We can gravitate towards teachers, opinions, even churches perhaps that make us feel comfortable. And that's part of what social media algorithms do, isn't it?

[13:45] They learn what we like to hear. They give us more of it. And before long, we can find ourselves in an echo chamber surrounded by voices that simply confirm what we already think. And we can mistake consensus for truth.

But the question God's people must always ask isn't what does everybody else think, nor even what do I want to be true for me in my situation, but what has the Lord said?

What does God say about this or that? And so Micaiah is summoned because there is still one man who is more interested in speaking God's word than echoing everybody else's.

But before Micaiah arrives, the narrator zooms out. He wants us to see the whole scene. So listen to verse 9 again. Just picture the scene.

Two kings seated on their thrones, dressed in their royal robes, 400 prophets filling the space.

Everything about the scene exudes confidence. These people are people that are the kind of people that know what they're all about.

[15:07] And then one of the prophets steps forward. Zedekiah, son of Canaanah. Sounds like a bit of a banana. But Zedekiah hasn't come empty-handed.

He's got props. He's got a pair of iron horns. Now, I'd love to know what happens here in this room. Has he been sitting in the corner of a room all afternoon, getting all creative, fashioning these pair of horns?

Or is this more like a kind of blue Peter moment? Here's one I made earlier. We don't know. We're not told. But anyway, he steps forward with these two iron horns and declares, This is what the Lord says.

With these horns, you're to go and gore the Arameans until they are destroyed. It's visual. It's theatrical. It's compelling.

The kind of thing that makes everybody think, Yes, this is convincing. This feels convincing. And the 400 prophets are all saying the same thing.

[16:10] It's unanimous. The atmosphere is electric. So it's into that room that God is about to send one man. One. Just one faithful messenger against 400.

Can you feel the pressure? Can you imagine what that must have felt like for Micaiah? Not simply the pressure of power. The pressure of consensus.

The pressure of going against the grain. The pressure of being the one person who says, Actually, I think you've all got it wrong. See, it's one thing to stand against obvious evil.

It's another thing altogether to stand against what everybody insists is obvious truth. That's the world that Micaiah is about to walk into.

And if we're followers of Jesus, we'll recognize something of that world, won't we? Perhaps not before Kings, but perhaps in the staff room, the school gates, the sports club, the Friday night drinks after work, the family lunch where everyone assumes that Christianity has long since been disproved.

[17:24] That's the pressure.

devoted to the Lord, and yet quietly accommodating ourselves to the assumptions of the world around us. That's the danger. That's why these verses matter.

Because before Micaiah ever opens his mouth, the question has already been placed before us. When everybody around you says, this is obvious, surely you don't think that.

Whose voice matters most? Now Micaiah is about to enter the stage. The first thing that we discover is that he's already settled that question.

So secondly, the resolve to stand firm. The messenger goes out to fetch Micaiah before Micaiah's entered the palace, before he stood before the kings, before he's heard the roar of the 400 prophets.

[18:52] The messenger quietly pulls them to one side. Just a little word of advice. Quiet word. Verse 12. He says, The other prophets, without exception, are predicting success for the king.

Do yourself a favor and let your words agree with theirs and speak favorably. Do you hear what he's really saying? Don't make life difficult for yourself, Micaiah.

Just go with the flow. Why be the one voice that spoils the party? Nobody's looking for the truth. They simply want agreement.

One more yes man. One more voice confirming what they've already decided to believe in their hearts. Now let's just stop there for a moment. What would you do if you were in Micaiah's shoes? What would you do? You haven't even entered the room yet. You already know what's expected of you. You already know what the kind of cost will be if you refuse to.

[20:05] Wouldn't it simply be easier to say what everybody wants to hear? But Micaiah doesn't wait until he stands before the kings to decide.

His courage doesn't begin in the throne room. It begins here, before anyone else is watching. He settles the matter here, right here, right now, in his heart.

And brothers and sisters, that is where the battle for faithfulness is so often won. Not in the moment. Before the moment. Long before Monday morning.

Long before the lecture theater. Long before the difficult conversation. Long before someone says, you don't really believe what the Bible says about that. Do you? Do you?

The battle is won long before the test comes. Listen to Micaiah. As surely as the Lord lives, I can tell him only what my God says.

[21:11] As surely as the Lord lives, I can tell him only what my God says. Just a handful of words. But they reveal to us why one man can stand against 400.

So let's slow down and listen. First part of it. Who does Micaiah fear? As surely as the Lord lives, everything begins there.

Not with Micaiah, with God. The Lord lives. He is the living God. The one before whom every other king must one day bow.

The maker of the heavens. And that is why Micaiah is not ultimately intimidated by Ahab. Because he fears someone infinitely greater.

The Bible never says the answer to the fear of man is simply to become braver. It says, the answer is a greater fear.

[22:16] The fear of the Lord. Do you know the living God? Not simply about him. Do you know him?

Is the living God real to you? Is he more real to you than the opinions of other people? When the living God becomes bigger in our vision, in our experience, people become smaller. Now that doesn't mean Christians never feel daunted. Of course we do. It's intimidating to be the only Christian in the room. It can be costly to stick out by standing up for Jesus. Those fears are real. But another reality is greater. The Lord lives. And because the Lord lives and because the Lord lives, Micaiah ultimately need fear no one else. Second bit of it. Whose voice does Micaiah trust? What my God says. The living God is not silent. He speaks. [23 : 30] And Micaiah knows the God who speaks. My God. My God. This is the language of belonging. I am his. He is mine.

And because the living God is his God, Micaiah's concern is not what everybody else is saying, nor what the king wants to hear, nor what Micaiah can invent in the moment. He isn't creating a message.

He's receiving a message. He isn't trying to read the room. He is listening to God. What my God says, that's what matters. And friends, that is exactly the same for us, isn't it?

God has spoken. Hebrews begins, in the past, God spoke through the prophets, but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son. God has revealed himself supremely through his son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christian faith is not inventing our own spirituality or constructing the kind of God that we'd quite like to meet. God has spoken. The question is, will we listen?

[24 : 35] And if we want to know this living God, we need to immerse ourselves in his word. Read it, meditate on it, pray over it.

Let it reshape your instincts, your loves, your desires, your fears, your anxieties, your ambitions. Because if God's word does not shape us, something else inevitably will.

Third part of it, what Micaiah cannot do. As the Lord lives, what my God says, I can tell him only. Only. Micaiah cannot say more. He cannot say less. He cannot edit God's word. He cannot soften it. He cannot tailor it to this particular audience.

What my God says, that is what I must speak. Can you picture him walking into that room? Two kings, 400 prophets. Every eye turns on him.

[25 : 33] The room waits for his answer. Are you going to get on with it and agree with everyone else? But the decision has already been made. There is no last minute calculation of wondering about which way the wind is blowing.

He's settled that outside. And that's where this becomes very practical for us. Because there will be moments when an opportunity to speak about Jesus comes unexpectedly.

Someone reconnects with us out of the blue from a former life. Someone asks whether you really believe all that Jesus stuff. Someone asks, what is it that gives you hope?

The apostle Peter says, always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

Be prepared. Notice that word, prepared. The assumption is that we've already settled it beforehand. Now the temptation will rarely be dramatic.

[26 : 40] Usually it will simply be to remain silent. And most compromises don't happen because we consciously decide to reject Jesus.

They happen because for one small moment we choose our own comfort over faithfulness. I want to tell you about a young person who recently found herself facing exactly that kind of a situation. Her school was hosting an assembly where pupils were given an opportunity to explain their faith. She knew what it would mean if she volunteered.

The whole school would know that she's a Christian. All the older pupils, all the teachers, all her friends.

and she knew that there would be every possibility that she would be laughed at, dismissed, mocked.

[27 : 45] She could have quite reasonably thought, why on earth would I put myself through that? But she believed that this was an opportunity that the Lord had put in front of her.

So she resolved in her heart to do it. She prepared beforehand what she was going to say and then she stood up in front of the whole school and told them about Jesus and his death on the cross and his resurrection about the good news of the gospel.

I couldn't imagine doing that when I was at school. That takes real guts, real courage. But notice where the courage began.

Not when she stood up. It began when she decided beforehand that if this opportunity comes, I will be faithful to the Lord.

Like Micaiah, she had settled that question before the moment came. But Micaiah isn't the one who gives us the power to be faithful.

[28:55] He's an example of faithfulness. Before we think of that, we need to look beyond the example because centuries later, another faithful prophet heads towards another city.

Jesus knew exactly what awaited him. Betrayal, rejection, a cross. Luke tells us that he set his face resolutely towards Jerusalem.

He walked there deliberately and willingly. and then follow him into Gethsemane. It's night. The disciples are behind him.

Jesus goes on alone into the darkness. And the weight of what lies ahead of him presses in on him. not merely betrayal, not merely hostile rulers, not merely spit fists, scourging, but the cup.

The cup of God's holy judgment against sin. The cup that he alone can drink. O my father, if it be possible, may this cup be taken from me.

[30:14] If ever there was a moment to turn back, this was it. And yet through the agony, through the blood and the sweat he prays, yet not as I will, but as you will.

Do you hear the echo? Micaiah stands outside the palace and settles the matter. What my God says, that I will speak.

Jesus kneels in the garden and settles the matter. Not my will, but yours be done.

Micaiah is an example. He shows us this is the way to stand firm. When everyone else around us is going the other way. But Jesus is more than an example.

He is the faithful one we follow. And his perfect faithfulness is not merely an example for us. It becomes our salvation. Because if we're honest, left to ourselves, we're not naturally like Micaiah, most of us.

[31:27] we're much closer to Peter in the high priest's courtyard, warming ourselves by the fire, keeping quiet, wanting to blend in. We know what it's like afterwards very often to think, why didn't I take that opportunity?

Why didn't I say something? We know what it's like to choose our comfort over faithfulness. But Christ never did.

Jesus resolved to be faithful to the Father, whatever that faithfulness ultimately cost him. And that faithfulness led him to the cross for people like you and me.

People who fear others more than God sometimes. People who keep silent when we should speak up. People prone to compromise. So I don't want you leaving here this evening thinking, I just need to try harder to be braver like Micaiah.

Micaiah shows us what faithfulness looks like. But Christ gives us the grace to become more faithful. We look to Micaiah as an example.

[32:36] We look to Christ as our Saviour and Lord. And as we come to Christ, as we trust him, as we listen to his word, as we keep in step by his spirit, the faithful Christ begins to make us faithful too.

So let me finish by two groups of people. Perhaps you've been coming along here for weeks or months. You've become increasingly convinced that Jesus is who he claims to be.

You've listened, you've admired, you've even begun to believe. But you've never actually decided for yourself to follow him.

Let me add you, tonight, don't stay on the fence. Jesus, he doesn't simply ask to be admired. He calls you, he summons you.

Come to him, trust him, follow him. And for those of us who already follow Jesus, perhaps especially those stepping into a new season or new situation at school or university or work, don't wait until the pressure comes to decide who you belong to.

[33:54] Settle it now, resolve it now, quietly before the Lord. Because tomorrow morning, none of us will be standing before King Ahab.

None of us will be before 400 prophets. But all of us will be walking into one room or another, a classroom, a meeting, a building site, a hospital ward, a cafe, a kitchen.

We're all going somewhere. And somewhere this week or next perhaps, you will feel the pressure simply to fit in. When that moment comes, don't decide then, decide now.

Not trusting in your own courage, but looking to Christ, the faithful witness, the one who remained faithful all the way to the cross and who now by his spirit gives us the grace to follow him.

Let's take a moment now to respond in the quiet of our hearts to what the Lord has been saying to us. to to the Lord has to have to the Lord has to follow Jesus.

[35 : 35] So living God, help us to follow Jesus. wherever he calls us, whatever it costs us, help us to fear you rather than others, to listen to your voice and to speak of Jesus boldly.

And for anyone here who has not yet followed him, please, Lord God, draw them to Jesus tonight. Help us to follow him with no turning back.

Amen. I'm going to respond now to God's word in song. Over to Greg and the band. Let's go.