

Strange Bedfellows: Jehoshaphat

Lenten Midweek #3 – 03/08/23 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: 2 Chronicles 17:1-6; 18:1-3; 19:1-7 Past. Keith Besel

Introduction

✘ There is a saying that goes like this: “Politics makes strange bedfellows”. It refers to the idea that people of differing views and character will often come together in order to achieve a common political goal. This is when alliances are made that would otherwise seem unlikely.

→ I’ve talked about this before, how the term “politics” literally refers to “how people live in a group”. So it isn’t only talking about “those people in Washington”. Truthfully you and I make alliances in every arena of life, which means that life is a series of compromises. Some say that all life is “the art of compromise”. So the question always is, “What and how much is compromised?”

I. A Marriage Alliance with Ahab

✘ Tonight we look at King Jehoshaphat, the son of Asa, whom we considered last week. That makes Jehoshaphat the great-great-great-grandson of King David, who inherited the throne of Judah after his father Asa. 2 Chronicles 17:3-4 tells us that Jehoshaphat “walked in the earlier ways of his father David” and “sought the God of his father and walked in His Commandments, and not according to the practices of Israel”. Additionally verses 5-6 say that he “had great riches and honor. His heart was courageous in the ways of the LORD”.

→ You might remember that at the end of his father Asa’s life, the Northern Kingdom of Israel was beginning to gather their military at the border, preparing to attack the Southern Kingdom of Judah. So Asa paid for outside help from Syria to attack Israel and distract them from their plans.

→ And so, as Jehoshaphat begins his reign things are marked by a bit of tension with Israel. No war ever materialized. In fact, the surrounding kingdoms actually feared Judah and even paid them tribute.

✘ In the text we consider tonight though Jehoshaphat has hatched an idea. Israel also had a new king, and Jehoshaphat wanted to make the most of an opportunity. What’s better than making war with Israel? Jehoshaphat thought, “Making love with Israel!” Chapter 18:1 says, “Now Jehoshaphat had great riches and honor, and he made a marriage alliance with Ahab”, the new king of Israel. Jehoshaphat gave his son Jehoram in marriage to King Ahab’s daughter Athaliah.

II. An Alliance with Evil brings Disaster

✘ In case you’re not familiar with politics in the ancient world, the idea of this is that a marriage alliance was often the best way to grow your kingdom. Plus, with this arrangement, it was then less likely that Israel would attack Judah, since King Ahab’s own daughter would be in line to be queen. And perhaps the kingdoms could even be reunited.

→ Sounds like a good move, right? And it did work for countless other kingdoms.

✘ The only problem though is that Jehoshaphat and Ahab were “strange bedfellows”. On the surface it might have seemed good. After all, they were both kings of God’s people. They spoke a common language and culturally they had much in common.

→ But below the surface, much separated Jehoshaphat and Ahab. In case you have been thinking that the name Ahab sounds familiar, it’s probably because his wife was, Queen Jezebel; the wicked queen that, along with her husband, was constantly trying to kill the prophet Elijah.

- But they didn't only have it out for Elijah. They also falsely-accused their neighbor Naboth and killed him just so that they could take his family vineyard for their own personal use.
- They worshiped idols and did all kinds of evil.
- ⊗ And now, by arranging a marriage alliance, Jehoshaphat and Ahab were "in bed together" – at least the prince and princess were.
 - Then chapter 18:2 tells us, "After some years [Jehoshaphat] went down (from the higher country) to Ahab in Samaria. And Ahab killed an abundance of sheep and oxen for him and for the people who were with him". Sounds great! Jehoshaphat goes to visit his son's in-law's, and it's party time!
 - But it ends up that King Ahab has his own sneaky idea. You see, Ahab was fighting Syria to the north of Israel and he wants to persuade Judah to join him in the fight. After all, that is what allies are for, right? And now the two are allies ever since this marriage alliance.
- ⊗ So Jehoshaphat honors his own arraignment and says, "I am as you are, my people as your people. We will be with you in the war" (18:3). By his own words, Jehoshaphat says that he and Ahab are now "bedfellows".
 - The great irony in this is that they are now going to fight Ben-hadad of Syria; the same guy that Jehoshaphat's father, King Asa paid in our lesson last week to attack Israel in the first place! So the country of Judah is going to fight against the very mercenaries that Judah hired to attack Israel, with whom they are now allies!
 - How times have changed! Jehoshaphat thought he was making peace, but his scheme now gets him dragged into war. That's what happens when you make alliances with men who believe differently than you, like King Ahab.
- ⊗ But that was only the half of it. Ahab's real plan was to get Jehoshaphat killed. You see, Ahab knew that Ben-hadad's primary goal in this war was to try and kill him. So Ahab disguised himself as an ordinary soldier but told Jehoshaphat, "You wear your robes," which is basically the same as putting a huge target on his chest (18:29). With allies like this guy, who needs enemies?
 - But in the end, Ahab's plot didn't work. God protected Jehoshaphat and Ahab was killed with an errant arrow through a crack in his armor. 1 Kings 22:38 tells us that "they washed the chariot (Ahab was in) by the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood, and the prostitutes washed themselves in it, according to the word of the LORD that He had spoken."
- ⊗ Jehoshaphat, on the other hand, repented of his sin-conceived ways and became one of the great kings of Judah. Of course that was pleasing to God, but the kingdom of Judah was already contaminated by Jehoshaphat's son and his marriage to Ahab's daughter.
 - Jehoshaphat's compromise seriously compromised the future of the entire kingdom. How so? Well, after Jehoshaphat's death, his son, Jehoram became king. And his wife, Athaliah had no interest whatsoever in leaving her worship of idols to follow Yahweh. So, because Jehoram was weak in his faith and would not stand up against his wife's unbelieving ways, the Scriptures are very clear in chapter 21:6, that Jehoram "walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had done, for the daughter of Ahab was his wife. And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD".
 - The entire kingdom of Judah now suffered terribly under the reign of the bad king Jehoram and his wife – and the next two kings after him as well. This is such an important lesson for us still today, that "Love" can truly blind us weak humans to the severity and danger of joining

together with one who does not love the LORD our God above the people and things of this sin-filled world.

- ✘ Yes, Jehoshaphat was one of the great kings of Judah, but we see here how he was seduced by the allure of this marriage alliance with Israel; an alliance that was deadly for so many.

III. When we are faithless, God remains faithful

- ✘ This adulteration of the house of David could have completely destroyed it. “Yet the Lord was not willing to destroy the house of David,” chapter 21:7 says, “because of the covenant that He had made with David, and since He had promised to give a lamp to him and to his sons forever”. 2 Timothy 2:13 says, “If we are faithless, [God] remains faithful – for He cannot deny Himself”. Yes, God remains true to His people despite the countless times that we are enticed into wickedness and idolatry.

IV. Jehoshaphat’s Descendant’s perfect love

- ✘ As good a king as Jehoshaphat was we all need a King who will not be lured away; whose commitment to His people is stronger than His desire for earthly alliances. We need the ultimate Son of Jehoshaphat; the One whose love and commitment to us all is perfect in every way; Who refused to bow down and worship the devil to gain the kingdoms of the world; Who would rather go alone to the cross than abandon His mission for our salvation; Whose one and only alliance is to His own people, even though His own, did not receive Him.

→ Yes, we need the Son of David, Who remained faithful to His faithless and sin-soaked bride; Who would ransom us even after we have often whored after other gods; Who redeemed us from the power of Sheol and death (Hos. 13:14). Ephesians 5:26-27 tells us that His is the blood that washed His Church white as snow so that He then presented His bride to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing by the washing of water with the Word.

- ✘ And yet this Son of God, Jesus, did so much more than just stand by us when we were faithless. He chose us to be His people despite our failings. The book of Hosea tells us that Jesus is our beloved Bridegroom, Who, in spite of our faithlessness, brings us into the wilderness and speaks tenderly to us (Hos. 2:14), saying, “You are My people” (Hos. 2:23); showering us with His mercy.

→ It’s easy to see how we, the Church and our Lord and Husband Jesus are certainly “strange bedfellows”. We are by nature sinful and unclean. We look longingly at other gods, many that are of our own making. We have proven ourselves to be easily seduced by pleasures and quick to betray our Beloved whenever we feel pressured. And yet, Jesus still loves His people; giving Himself over to die for us. He has graciously joined Himself to us so that not even death can separate us. Yes, this Son of Jehoshaphat is forever faithful to us, His people.

Conclusion

- ✘ So, despite what you and I see around us in the world – that life is defined as “the art of compromise”, Scripture shows us here tonight that the life of Christ’s people is different from all others. It is not found in compromise. Rather our life is found only in Jesus Christ’s one-sided marriage alliance to us.

→ We are His unworthy bride. He is our faithful Husband; embracing us entirely with His sacrificial and perfect love. His is a promise; a vow that He has made and fulfilled with the guarantee of His own blood; now given to us with the seal of our Baptism. With Him there are no split allegiances. He is wholly ours, and because of that love we offer Him our entire heart, mind and soul in faith and worship. “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” (Mat. 19:6). Amen.