

When God Gives Us What We Ask For

2 Chronicles 18 – p. 370 in pew Bibles

The title of today's message is "When God Gives Us What We Ask For." But if this were the days of the Puritans, when the titles of their books and sermons were almost as long as the books and sermons themselves, it could easily be called something like, "The Tragedy of Getting What You Want When Your Heart Is Closed Off To The Will of God As Revealed By His Word." Because that's exactly what we find in 2 Chronicles 18 with Ahab, king of Israel, and, sadly, with the help of the righteous king Jehoshaphat of Judah.

The Scriptures tell us that Ahab was one of the most wicked kings in Israel's history. He and his wife, Jezebel, lead Israel into idolatry and lived lives of complete rebellion against God.

Ahab had for himself prophets, a whole bunch of them, actually, that he would seek for advice. The only problem is, these "prophets" were really no more than yes men who told Ahab what he wanted to hear and always prophesied good things for him.

Because of its length, we're going to read through chapter 18 in sections this morning, and I will be pointing out truths along the way. I want to point out three truths, actually, that I believe give us some valuable instruction concerning how we can better honor God as we interact with His Word.

Our first point this morning is found in verses 1-7. Please follow along with me in your Bibles as I read from God's holy Word:

Now Jehoshaphat had great riches and honor, and he made a marriage alliance with Ahab. ²After some years he went down to Ahab in Samaria. And Ahab killed an abundance of sheep and oxen for him and for the people who were with him, and induced him to go up against Ramoth-gilead. ³Ahab king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat king of Judah, "Will you go with me to Ramoth-gilead?" He answered him, "I am as you are, my people as your people. We will be with you in the war."

⁴And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "Inquire first for the word of the Lord." ⁵Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, four hundred men, and said to them, "Shall we go to battle against Ramoth-gilead, or shall I refrain?" And they said, "Go up, for God will give it into the hand of the king." ⁶But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not here another prophet of the Lord of whom we may inquire?" ⁷And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord, Micaiah the son of Imlah; but I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me, but always evil." And Jehoshaphat said, "Let not the king say so."

It says here that Ahab had it in his mind to go to war against Ramoth-gilead. This is something he obviously really wanted to do and he even went out of his way to get Jehoshaphat on board with his plan.

We see this happen over and over today. Whenever someone has a mind to do something or if they have a certain belief or lifestyle that is against God's Word or against sound wisdom, and they don't want to give it up, they go about trying to get people to agree with them and to join their cause. This is an attempt to somehow justify their actions by amassing people who agree with them.

But Jehoshaphat, being the godly man that he was, thought it was best if they asked God first before they set out to do this thing. After all, this was a war. Jehoshaphat knew that if God was not with them, things would go very badly.

So Ahab called his prophets...400 of them! Why 400? Well, I believe that Ahab, like us today, believed that there was strength in numbers. If he had 400 so-called prophets agreeing with his every whim, then he had created a strong case for himself. As we'll see, though, these "prophets" were there for only one reason – to tell Ahab what he wanted to hear. He may have paid them well to do this, or, more likely, he probably threatened to kill them if they didn't prophesy what he wanted.

Well Jehoshaphat knew something smelled fishy, so he asked, "Isn't there any other prophet we could ask?"

Ahab, probably rolling his eyes and sighing deeply, said, well yes, there's this guy Micaiah but I hate him, because he never tells me what I want to hear and he's always telling me I'm evil and that I'm going to be judged by God.

This brings us to point number one:

1. The truth of God's Word exposes evil in our hearts and graciously warns of judgment. (vv. 1-7)

Now under this point there are three truths I want to point out that are extremely important to understanding how God's Word is designed to work in our lives.

The first thing we must understand is:

- God determines truth – God is the Creator of all things, and as such, His Word and His ways are the very definition and essence of truth. This also means that He has all authority over all creation. Colossians 1:16-17 says, speaking of Jesus Christ, "¹⁶For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together." So then God is the plumb line. He is the standard, He defines truth. And His Word is and shall always be truth.
- His Word is like a mirror, only this mirror shows us the perfect holiness of God; it shows us the perfection of Christ, the One who perfectly reflected the image of God, and allows us to see ourselves against that reflection. Man was created in the image of God which means he was created to reflect God to the world. But sin has marred that image and we no longer glorify Him to the rest of the world. Instead

we reflect ourselves. But when we look into the Word of God, we see ourselves against the perfection of Christ. And we see all our imperfections and rebellion. We see all the ways we fall short of the glory of God. But what I want you to understand this morning is, this is a GOOD thing! Because...

- We should see God's Word as a gracious and loving gift that God gives us to save us from judgment. To say it a different way, God's Word is given to us to save us from ourselves. God could have just left sinful man to himself and He would have been completely just in doing so. If God hadn't have sent Jesus to save us, we would have died in our sins and we would have been lost forever. Eternally separated from God in hell, with no hope. Just let that sink in for a moment. But God, in His gracious and loving mercy, revealed Himself to the world through His Word, which has its ultimate expression in the person and work of Jesus Christ. And in doing so, He reached out to us, showed us His truth, and calls us to believe and follow. That is grace!

So the first thing we have to understand is, the truth of God's Word exposes evil in our hearts and graciously warns of judgment, and this is a very good thing.

The second point this morning comes to us from verses 8-13. Follow along as I read:

⁸ Then the king of Israel summoned an officer and said, "Bring quickly Micaiah the son of Imlah." ⁹ Now the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah were sitting on their thrones, arrayed in their robes. And they were sitting at the threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria, and all the prophets were prophesying before them. ¹⁰ And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made for himself horns of iron and said, "Thus says the Lord, 'With these you shall push the Syrians until they are destroyed.'" ¹¹ And all the prophets prophesied so and said, "Go up to Ramoth-gilead and triumph. The Lord will give it into the hand of the king."

¹² And the messenger who went to summon Micaiah said to him, "Behold, the words of the prophets with one accord are favorable to the king. Let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak favorably." ¹³ But Micaiah said, "As the Lord lives, what my God says, that I will speak. ¹⁴ And when he had come to the king, the king said to him, "Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I refrain?" And he answered, "Go up and triumph; they will be given into your hand." ¹⁵ But the king said to him, "How many times shall I make you swear that you speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?" ¹⁶ And he said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the Lord said, 'These have no master; let each return to his home in peace.'" ¹⁷ And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?"

So point number 2:

2. We are to place ourselves under the authority of God's Word, not try to make it say what we want it to. (vv. 8-13)

Ahab reluctantly sent for Micaiah, mostly to prove to Jehoshaphat what he had been saying.

Meanwhile, all the other 400 “prophets” continued to assure the king that the Lord has said that he will prevail in his battle against Ramoth-gilead.

The messenger who was sent to get Micaiah did his best to prep Micaiah for his appearance before the kings. He said, basically, all the other prophets are prophesying the same thing and telling king Ahab exactly what he wants to hear. You need to go and agree with them and give the king a favorable report. But Micaiah said to him, in essence, “Whatever *God* tells me to say, that’s what I will say.”

Now stop right there for a minute.

Notice the mindset of this messenger, which was more than likely the mindset of king Ahab and all his company as well. This messenger was *telling* a prophet what to say! This tells me three things:

- They really had no desire to hear what God said.
- There was more fear of Ahab than there was of God.
- Which leads me to deduce that they either had a completely faulty view of God, or, more likely, really didn’t believe in Him to begin with.

Either way, they completely lacked what we said in the first point, the understanding that God is the Creator and alone determines truth. And lacking these things, they proceeded to put themselves and their will over God’s Word, even before it was revealed.

This is a recipe for disaster, folks. When we go to God’s Word and already have an attitude that we are going to do what we want regardless, then we’ve set ourselves against the council of God even from the start. Nothing we hear or read from Him will have any bearing upon our hearts. And here’s the scary part... We will most likely find in the Word exactly what we WANT to find there and we can find ourselves in deception. And this means we will continue in our sin and yet think we’re OK.

Conversely, David was God’s model king in this regard. That doesn’t mean David did everything right. Far from it. After David had committed adultery and murdered Bathsheba’s husband to try to cover up his sin, he was confronted by Nathan the prophet.

Now I want you to see this. Both Ahab and David were confronted with God’s Word. Nathan came to David and confronted him directly with His sin. At that point, David could have balked. After all, He was king! He could have had Nathan excommunicated or even executed. He could have sent Nathan away. He could have done any number of things to avoid submitting to God’s Word. But he didn’t. Instead, God’s Word cut through to his heart and he submitted and repented.

Why? Because as Psalm 51 reveals to us, David cared more about his relationship with God than getting his own way. His heart was tender toward the Lord. He knew that his sin created a barrier in his relationship with God, and so in verses 11-12 of Psalm 51 he prayed:

¹¹ *Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.*

¹² *Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit. (Psalm 51:11-12)*

But before that, David was willing to acknowledge that he was wrong and God's truth was right. He said in verses 3-4:

³ *For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.*

⁴ *Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words
and blameless in your judgment.*

Don't miss what David was saying here. He is acknowledging that he is wrong and God's Word is right. He's acknowledging that God's Word is the standard of what is right and wrong and, when compared to that standard, he saw that he did wrong. But that takes humility. Our pride keeps us from submitting to God's Word. With pride we are attempting to protect things that are more important to us than God. Our reputation, our comfort, our status, our worldly possessions...all these things can become idols that keep us from humbling ourselves before God and being willing to receive His Word readily.

Micaiah came to Ahab and told him that if he went into battle against Ramoth-gilead, it would end in disaster. But Ahab held on to his pride. He refused to submit to the pure Word of God and repent. His mind was already made up. And as a result, his life ended in tragedy. Which brings us to our third point this morning:

3. Failure to heed the truth of God's Word always ends in tragedy. (vv. 18-34)

Look with me at verses 18-34:

¹⁸ *And Micaiah said, "Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing on his right hand and on his left. ¹⁹ And the Lord said, 'Who will entice Ahab the king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one said one thing, and another said another. ²⁰ Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, saying, 'I will entice him.' And the Lord said to him, 'By what means?' ²¹ And he said, 'I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And he said, 'You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so.' ²² Now therefore behold, the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of these your prophets. The Lord has declared disaster concerning you."*

²³ *Then Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah came near and struck Micaiah on the cheek and said, "Which way did the Spirit of the Lord go from me to speak to you?" ²⁴ And Micaiah said, "Behold, you shall see on that day when you go into an inner chamber to hide yourself." ²⁵ And the king of Israel said, "Seize Micaiah and take him back to Amon the governor of the city and to Joash the king's son, ²⁶ and say, 'Thus says the king, Put this fellow in prison and feed him with meager rations of bread and water until I return in peace.'" ²⁷ And Micaiah said, "If you return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me." And he said, "Hear, all you peoples!"*

28 So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead. 29 And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "I will disguise myself and go into battle, but you wear your robes." And the king of Israel disguised himself, and they went into battle. 30 Now the king of Syria had commanded the captains of his chariots, "Fight with neither small nor great, but only with the king of Israel." 31 As soon as the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, "It is the king of Israel." So they turned to fight against him. And Jehoshaphat cried out, and the Lord helped him; God drew them away from him. 32 For as soon as the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back from pursuing him. 33 But a certain man drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel between the scale armor and the breastplate. Therefore he said to the driver of his chariot, "Turn around and carry me out of the battle, for I am wounded." 34 And the battle continued that day, and the king of Israel was propped up in his chariot facing the Syrians until evening. Then at sunset he died.

Now we have an absolutely horrifying picture here. Do you remember those 400 "prophets" that Ahab had? This passage tells us that God sent a lying spirit to those prophets so that they would tell Ahab what he wanted to hear and that disaster would come upon him. What's that all about? Why did God do that?

For one reason. Because Ahab's heart was hardened against hearing God's true Word. He had no desire to hear what God was really saying to him. He wanted what he wanted. So God gave him over to his wishes as his judgment. God basically said, "You don't want to hear my Word, fine. I'll give you exactly what you want."

I want you to see the tragedy of what happens when we insist on our way and God gives us what we want. It always ends in tragedy in two ways:

- Temporally – This is when God giving us over...

In 1 Samuel 8, the elders of Israel came to Samuel and demanded that he give them a king.

1 Samuel 8, beginning in verse 4:

4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah 5 and said to him, "Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations." 6 But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the Lord.

Here you have Israel demanding a king. But notice the contrast to what Samuel did. It says, "And Samuel prayed to the Lord." Israel wanted what they wanted without asking God. Look how God responds, starting in verse 7:

7 And the Lord said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. 8 According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you. 9 Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them."

So Samuel did as God said and warned them of all the things that would happen if they got a king like the other nations. But again, Israel insisted upon having their way.

¹⁹ But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. And they said, “No! But there shall be a king over us, ²⁰ that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.” ²¹ And when Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the Lord. ²² And the Lord said to Samuel, “Obey their voice and make them a king.”

Well, we know the rest of the story. Samuel anoints Saul, and Saul goes on to do his own thing without consulting God—just like the people he ruled—and ended up disobeying God, bringing shame to his nation, and having his kingship revoked by God.

Folks, it’s a scary thing when God gives you over to yourself.

That’s what we have in Romans 1. Verses 21 through 32 are so important to us understanding our world today because we see God giving people over to their own sinful lifestyles when they refused to acknowledge Him and refuse to listen to the truth of His Word.

²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity...

²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions...

²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done...

Author Kevin DeYoung commented on the popular saying that we hear quite often today, “I’ve got to be true to myself!” He says, “Well, if that self is not in Christ, that’s about the worst thing that you can do. And you understand that our whole world says that the point of your life is to find yourself, express yourself, and don’t let anyone deny what you want to be because it’s who you are, you can be whatever you want. But there’s nothing worse than for God to say to us, “You know what? Whatever you want to do, and be, and think, and say, and feel, and experience, go for it. I give you over to yourself.” We don’t realize how much grace God gives us by simply keeping in check our natural desires and inclinations. Unrestrained personal freedom is the worst kind of tyranny.” – Kevin DeYoung

So for those who insist upon their own way and pay no attention to the Word of God, life leads to tragedy temporally. God will give them what they ask for and that will be a judgment upon them. But secondly, for those who finally reject the truth of God’s Word, it ends in tragedy...

- Eternally

There’s much that needs to be said about this, but suffice it today to say that Jesus certainly never shied away from teaching about Hell and judgment. He spoke rather boldly about it

actually. Why is that? Because in His love, He tells us the truth. And the truth is, those who reject God's Word will be eternally judged and separated from God forever.

Oh that people would come to understand the truth of Jeremiah 29:11! It's so much more than just a great verse for your coffee mug. This verse shows us the heart of God and his mercy, and why He sends His Word into the world to warn them. God gives us His Word, not for evil or so that our lives would somehow be less abundant. Quite the opposite! ¹¹ "For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope."

Things could have gone a whole lot better for Ahab if he wouldn't have insisted on having his way, but if he rather recognized the grace of God that was spoken to him through Micaiah. If he would have sought the Word of the Lord in humility, and believed in the goodness of the Lord. That God has plans for our good and that His Word is given to us to reveal to us His wonderful grace and provision.

What is God speaking to you through His Word? What is God saying to Americans as a people, as a nation, right now through His Word? What things are we asking for in this hour? Are they things that would truly align with His will as revealed in His Word? Are we listening, or have we already made up our minds what we want to do?

Through Christ, the living Word, we can know God's goodness and provision. As we see Him, like a mirror we also see our sins, our failures, our faithless hearts. We see our self-centeredness that causes us to insist upon our own way apart from God's revealed will. But as we see Him we also see the love and grace of God revealed. We see abundant mercy and grace that not only calls us to obedience, but empowers us to do so. God says to us, I know the plans I have for you and they are plans of hope and an eternal future. If only we would humbly receive His Word to us.

Let's pray.