

NO OBSTACLES

2 Chronicles 18

(idea from outline by Dennis Magary)

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God has no obstacles in working His will. In fact, He uses our folly, our sinfulness, our selfishness, and our mistakes in some ironic way to accomplish what He wanted all along anyway. One of the mysteries of the sovereignty of God is that He can give us a complete freedom of choice and, yet, turn and use our own poor selections to accomplish His will – even when we've disappointed Him in what we have decided.

What we finally see is there are no obstacles to God's will. God works out His purpose through and in spite of the obstacles in our lives. God gets His way despite you and despite me. There is a real way in which we make our own poor choices, and, therefore, we are not used as God would want us to be used. Indeed, we may not live as God would want us to live. But His overarching purposes are accomplished with or without us. It is we, ourselves, who miss out – who are left out.

He had a lot of money. In 2 Chronicles 17-20 we have the story of the wealthy king Jehoshaphat. Not only did he have a lot of money, he was a devout king to God. He accomplished everything he accomplished because the Lord was with him. 2 Chronicles 17:3 says, "The Lord was with Jehoshaphat because he followed the example of his father David's earlier days and did not worship the other gods." He followed the commandments.

Jehoshaphat had everything going for him. He was obedient, and God was blessing him. The last thing he needed was to enter into an alliance with dreaded, nasty Ahab, king of Israel. He was established as king. All of Judah had given him so many gifts, until he had great wealth and honor. In fact, God was blessing Jehoshaphat so much that in 2 Chronicles 17:10 we learn that "the dread of the Lord was on all the kingdoms of the lands where were around Judah, so that they did not make war against Jehoshaphat."

I. Choose your friends and allies carefully.

When we come to chapter 18 we're surprised. We learn that Jehoshaphat had great riches and honor, yet he's trying to make an alliance with Ahab – that dirty, rotten character among the kings of the Old Testament. Jehoshaphat's son married Ahab's daughter. It was a political arrangement. Ahab just happened to invite Jehoshaphat over for a party, and – my – did he put out the spread. He slaughtered sheep after sheep and ox after ox. He had a buffet that made the food on a Carnival cruise look like bread and water. Just when Jehoshaphat is overwhelmed and dazzled by the

extravagance of his state visit to Samaria, he is swept off his feet – notice the word, he’s induced (verse 2) to become Ahab’s tag team partner in the big showdown with Ramoth-gilead.

It was Ahab’s fight – not Jehoshaphat’s. Jehoshaphat, what are you thinking? You don’t have anything to gain. Look what he says when he’s asked. “I am as you are, and my people as your people, and we will be with you in battle” – look at the end of verse 3.

He knows better. You never join forces with those like Ahab, who hate the Lord. God had already given him everything. Jehoshaphat knew better, and oftentimes we know better when we join forces with those who are not committed to the Lordship of Christ Jesus. We say to them, as Jehoshaphat said to Ahab, “I’m in with you. I am as you are.”

Look at 2 Chronicles 19:2

Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him and said to King Jehoshaphat, “Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord and so bring wrath on yourself from the Lord?”

It’s almost an insult. Jehoshaphat wants to see if God will bless his wicked decision. “Can we see what the prophets say before we enter into battle?” Yes, sometimes we ask God what He’s thinking when we’re going to do what we want to do anyway. And so it was that day with Jehoshaphat as Ahab called the prophets.

II. Never pick a preacher who will only say what you want to hear.

There were 400 paid-for prophets – just the kind of guys who would tell a king anything he wanted to hear because he paid their salary. He posed the question, as if he wasn’t already sure what the answer would be. “Shall we go up to battle against Ramoth-gilead, or shall we stay home?” (You’ll find that in verse 5.) They said, “Go up, for God will give it into the hand of the king.”

Zedekiah was among those false prophets. Zedekiah had the false prophets perform a drama. It was quite a circus act they had going to convince Jehoshaphat to go to battle with Ahab. Zedekiah took horns made out of iron, put them on his head, and began to act like he was goring the others saying, “Thus says the Lord, ‘With these you shall gore the Arameans until they are consumed.’” All the prophets shouted “Go up to Ramoth-gilead.” Zedekiah ran to and fro with those horns, acting out the power of Israel against the Arameans.

Somehow, acting it out gave it a little bit more legitimacy, or so they thought. But Jehoshaphat wasn’t really convinced. “Is there a prophet of the Lord we might could find?” Not a paid-for prophet, an employed evangelist, or a sought-after seer. These were the yes men of the yes men. “Don’t you have a prophet of the Lord available?”

“Well, there is one guy, but I hate him,” Ahab says (verse 7). “He never has a good word to say about me. His name is Micaiah, and my, is he a pessimistic prophet.”

In verse 12, the messenger goes to summon Micaiah and says, “Now everybody else has good things to say about the king. I hope you’ll speak favorably, too. Let your message sound like their message.” But, says Micaiah, “I can only speak what the Lord tells me to speak” (verse 13).

So the king asks, “Shall we go up and succeed against Ramoth-gilead?” Micaiah said, “Oh yes, king, you will succeed. You go up. God wants you to fight this war. You will be victorious, oh great and wonderful king. You the man, Ahab.”

There was something of sarcasm in his voice. King Ahab was troubled by it. “I want you to tell me the truth.”

“Okay, Ahab – here’s the truth. I saw the whole army of Israel. They were scattered over the mountains. They were like a sheep who had no shepherd.” That means Ahab the shepherd is dead.

“Didn’t I tell you,” said Ahab to Jehoshaphat, “this guy has nothing good to say – nothing but evil about me.”

“In fact,” says Micaiah, “I saw the Lord sitting on his throne.” (Congregation, this is a rare glimpse into the divine and heavenly court. We are transported as readers of the text into the very throne room of God Almighty. Open your eyes wide. You won’t be invited to visit this place often, not even in the texts of scripture.) “All the hosts of heaven were standing on His right and on His left. The Lord said, ‘Who will go and entice Ahab king of Israel to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?’ And one said this while another said that. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord and said, ‘I will entice him.’ And the Lord said to him, ‘How?’ He said, ‘I’ll be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.’ Then He said, ‘You are to entice him and prevail also. Go and do as you have said.’”

Now this is a funny scene – God sitting on the throne, His heavenly host around him. God says, “Ahab has been an evil king. I want him to fall. It’s his time to die. His number is up at Ramoth-gilead. Now, who’s going to talk him into going into this foolish battle?”

You begin to see the heavenly throne room as the heavenly hosts begin to chat. “We could do this...we could do that.” They are coming up with plans to fool old Ahab. Finally, one spirit steps forward with a grand plan. “I’ll tell you what. I’ll be a spirit of deception. I’ll go and be the mouth of the false prophets, assuring him he can go to battle and he’ll be victorious.”

Isn’t that odd? Don’t you see that God’s will has no obstacles? These false prophets, who think they are paid-for by the king, are actually – even though they are running in the opposite direction of the truth of God – part of the strategy of God Himself to seduce Ahab into the death trap of war. You see, God allowed the foolishness of this king to be his own undoing.

That’s the way God is. He allows those who oppose Him to choose how they are going to go down. He gives us over – as we’ve seen in our Romans Bible study – to our own desires, and our own desires become our own undoing.

These paid-for prophets, who rarely, ever are instruments of God, are actually now instruments of the Almighty. In spite of their own wishes, they are saying what God wants them to say. And, as troublesome as it might be, it is a deceptive word. You see, if you really believe in the sovereignty

of God, you believe God is big enough to give us our own free choices, uninfluenced by His powerful hand, and He is able to use whatever we choose to work out His purposes anyway.

III. There are no obstacles for God.

Yet, our freedom of choice is not thwarted. Ahab chose to be evil. He was constantly and willfully disobedient against the prophets of God.

Yes, the prophets made their own decision to be paid-for yes men. And even as they chose to be yes men, false prophets – God uses false prophets to be prophets for His cause.

Now when Micaiah made this statement that the paid-for prophets were really being controlled by a deceptive spirit from the throne room of God, that made Zedekiah and the boys very, very mad. Look at verse 23. Zedekiah struck Micaiah on the cheek and said, “How did the Spirit of the Lord pass from me to speak to you?” “What makes you think God is speaking through you and not me?” said Zedekiah. Micaiah, sarcastic again, says “You are a seer who cannot see.”

To the dungeon with Micaiah, said King Ahab. “Lock him up, put him on bread and water until I get back from war safely.” Of course, Micaiah had said Ahab was not going to return from war. Look at verse 27. “If you indeed return safely, the Lord not spoken by me.” Micaiah put his money where his mouth was, and he said, “Listen, everybody, to what I have said.”

IV. When you go your way instead of God’s way, you place yourself in danger.

Isn’t it interesting that since Jehoshaphat, the godly king, wanted to hear what the prophet of the Lord had to say before he went to battle – isn’t it interesting that when the prophet of the Lord said “Don’t go, you’re going to lose” that Jehoshaphat was willing to go anyway. He didn’t really want to know what the Lord had to say.

Aren’t we like that sometimes? When God blesses us in our will and our way, then we’ll go down the path He desires. But if God’s path and God’s way do not converge with ours, we go our way anyway. You see, congregation, so many times what we want in our lives is not God’s will, but rather God’s blessing upon our own way and our own will. What we want is not divine guidance but divine acceptance of what we’ve already predetermined and decided in our own mind. So it was with Jehoshaphat who was, otherwise, a very good king.

It was battle day. Ahab, king of Israel, and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, went up against Ramoth-gilead. Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, “You know, I think I’ll disguise myself.” I ponder whether or not he heard Micaiah’s prophecy echoing in the background that Israel would be a sheep without a shepherd – that is, the king was going to die. “Yeah, that’s right Jehoshaphat. I’m just going to wear my street clothes. You go ahead and wear your kingly attire into battle.” He knew good and well that whoever wore the attire of the king might as well have had a big bull’s eye target painted on his back and on his chest for everybody to see.

The king of Aram had commanded his captains – 32 in all – saying, “Don’t fight with just anyone today. We’re going after the king of Israel.”

When the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat in his kingly, general-type attire, they thought this must be Ahab, the target. They went after him like park pigeons swarming around crusts of bread. Jehoshaphat prayed to God. He cried out. The eyes of the captains were opened, and they saw it was not Ahab. They had been fooled. They left Jehoshaphat alone.

Dennis Magary says we pan over to a distant bunker. There are a couple of Assyrian soldiers. It's been a slow day for them. They are ready to wrap it up. One of the soldiers just drew back his bow – for the fun of it – and let the random arrow fly. Wouldn't you know? It hit the king of Israel, who was disguised among the ordinary men on the battlefield. It happened to strike him at the small crease between the joints of his armor.

As Magary says, "Lucky shot? Hardly. God said it was His will."

The will of God knows no obstacles.

You can run, but you cannot hide. Disguise himself as he might, God still had the goods on Ahab, and He guided the random arrow to pierce the king in the slender, vulnerable slot between the armor.

Micaiah was right – the true prophet of God. The paid-for prophets were wrong. They did not, like the bull of iron horns, gore the Arameans, but rather were gored by them.

God was gracious to Jehoshaphat. He was in the wrong place with the wrong people, and God spared him because God had blessed his life.

Perhaps you're here today and you're like Jehoshaphat. God has blessed your life and, yet, you begin to follow the wrong crowd and to go to the wrong places. God has spared you, and you need to wake up and move on – back to the people of God and the places of God.

Perhaps you're here and you're like King Ahab or the paid-for prophets. You think you're having your way and having your will. You realize that even in your choices – your free choices of disobedience – that God is acting out His sovereignty. The irony is that in your freedom, you're really shackled to the power and the will of God because He knows no obstacles.

God is going to get His will done – His will and His way for His people and His creation. You can be a part of the people of the plan of God, or you can go on in your own foolish folly, fumbling through life only to find out, in the final analysis, that you've been part of God's plan anyway. He's used you to accomplish His task.

Sometimes it is healthy to step back and see how big God is and know He is going to work out His will despite the problem people in your life and despite the problem circumstances in your life and despite the crises in your life. God will have His way. The purposes of God don't end our responsibility, but they require us to move to action. They don't mean an end to our planning. Rather, they constitute the very ground for it. We should be making plans that are faithful and responsive to God's plans.

God is God. In Psalm 139, the psalmist meditates on the unlimited nature of God's presence, His knowledge and His power. He concludes there is nowhere he can go away from God. We can cut ourselves off from our fellow human beings, but we cannot get away from our creator. "You hem me in, behind and before," he says. "Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens – the sky – you are there. If I make my bed in the depths – that's the underworld – you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, I still cannot escape from the presence of God. Even there your hand will guide me. Nor can darkness, which hides me from human sight, shield me from God's gaze."

And He knows us. "Oh Lord," he says, "you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise. You perceive my thoughts. You're familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue, you know it completely, O Lord."

We can hide our heart, our past, our future plans from those around us. But we can hide nothing from God. God knows no obstacles. God declares that He has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand. And with the breadth of His hand, He's marked off the heavens. He's weighed mountains on scales, and hills in the balance.

Think of the world's big ones. Think of Sennacherib or Nebuchadnezzar. Think of Alexander or Napoleon or Hitler. Think today of Biden, Xi Jinping, or Putin. Do you suppose that it is really these big men who determine the way the world is going to go? Think again. God is greater than the world's big men. He brings princes to naught, and reduces rulers of the world to nothing (Isaiah 40:23). He is, as the prayer book says, the only ruler of princes. Behold your God.

God knows no obstacles. He's going to get His will done with or without you. You can join in or miss out, but you cannot limit Him.

Even a combination of kings, then or now, cannot stop the will and the way of Yahweh.