

March 8, 2023, Lenten Midweek 3

Strange Bedfellows: Jehoshaphat

2 Chronicles 17:1–6; 18:1–3; 19:1–7

Psalms 45; Revelation 2:18–28; Matthew 7:24–27

Hymns: *LSB* 438, 644

“Politics makes strange bedfellows” expresses the idea that people of differing views and character come together to achieve political goals.

Alliances are made that would otherwise seem unlikely. And politics isn’t just Washington. The politics of business makes alliances to get a good deal. In fact, we make alliances in every arena of life.

Unfortunately, that makes life a series of compromises. It could be said that all life, as politics, is the art of compromise. The question always is, what and how much is compromised?

We come today to Jehoshaphat, the son of Asa, whom we considered last week. Jehoshaphat is the great-great-great-grandson of King David and succeeded his father Asa to the throne of Judah. We read 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*” (17:3–4).

Moreover, Jehoshaphat ***“had great riches and honor. His heart was courageous in the ways of the Lord”*** (17:5–6).

Recall that at the end of his father Asa’s life, the Northern Kingdom of Israel was threatening the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Asa had paid for outside help, for Syria to attack Israel. And so the beginning of Jehoshaphat’s reign was marked by tension as the new king of Judah fortified the northern border with Israel. However, there was no war, and in fact, the surrounding kingdoms feared Judah and paid tribute.

Now Jehoshaphat had an idea. There was a new king in Israel, and Jehoshaphat saw an opportunity: What’s better than making war with Israel? Making love with Israel! Make love, not war. ***“Now Jehoshaphat had great riches and honor, and he made a marriage alliance with Ahab”*** (18:1). He gave his son Jehoram in marriage to King Ahab’s daughter Athaliah.

The idea, in case you’re not familiar with the politics of the ancient world, is that a marriage alliance is often the best way to grow the kingdom.

First of all, it was less likely King Ahab of Israel would attack Judah, since his own daughter was in line to be queen. And perhaps the kingdoms could even be reunited. Sounds like a good move, right? It worked for countless other kingdoms. Why not here? What a great idea!

But Jehoshaphat and Ahab were strange bedfellows. Yes, they were both kings of God's people. They spoke a common language and had much in common culturally. However, much separated Jehoshaphat and Ahab as well. If you don't remember Ahab, perhaps you've heard of his wife, Jezebel; they were quite a pair. They were constantly trying to kill the prophet Elijah. They falsely accused their neighbor Naboth and killed him so they could take his family vineyard. They worshiped idols and did all manner of evil. And now, by arranging a marriage alliance, Jehoshaphat and Ahab were in bed together—at least the prince and princess were.

“After some years [Jehoshaphat] 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” (18:2).

What a welcome! Jehoshaphat goes to visit his son-in-law's, and it's party time! But King Ahab has an idea of his own. King Ahab is fighting Syria and wants to induce Judah to join the fight. That's what allies are for, is it not?

So, Jehoshaphat says, ***"I am as you are, my people as your people. We will be with you in the war"*** (18:3). Thus, Judah and Israel have been joined as one—bedfellows. The great irony is that they will go to fight Ben-hadad of Syria. Yes, the very same Ben-hadad that Asa, Jehoshaphat's father, had paid to attack Israel in the first place! So now Judah is going to fight against the mercenaries Judah had hired! How times have changed! Jehoshaphat thought he was making peace but gets dragged into a war. That's what happens when you make alliances with men like King Ahab.

But that was only the beginning. Ahab's real plan was to get Jehoshaphat killed. Ahab knew that Ben-hadad, the Syrian king, would try to kill him and thus end the war quickly. So, Ahab disguised himself as an ordinary soldier and told Jehoshaphat, ***"You wear your robes,"*** so he would look like the king (18:29).

With allies like these, who needs enemies?

In the end, the plot didn't work. Ahab was killed, and his blood ended up mixed with water from a public pool. Dogs licked it up, and prostitutes washed themselves in it (1 Kings 22:38). Jehoshaphat, on the other hand, would repent and be one of the great kings of Judah. However, the contamination of Judah by marriage to a daughter of Ahab had a cost.

Jehoshaphat led his people into a compromised future. What happens to Judah after he dies and Jehoram becomes king? Jehoram is married to Athaliah, the daughter of Jezebel. She had no intention of leaving idolatry behind and faithfully following Yahweh. In fact, the Scriptures make this point very clear, 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”*** (21:6). Judah suffered terribly under the reign of the bad king Jehoram and his wife! Jehoshaphat was indeed one of the great kings of Judah, but he was seduced by the allure of this marriage alliance with Israel.

This adulteration of the house of David could have destroyed it. ***“Yet the Lord was not willing to destroy the house of David, 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”*** (21:7). From 2 Timothy: ***“If we are faithless, [God] remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself”*** (2 Timothy 2:13). God remains true to his people despite their being beguiled into wickedness and idolatry.

Jehoshaphat was a good king of Judah, but we need the King who is better than he; we need a King who will not be lured away—whose commitment to his people is stronger than his desire for alliances. We need the Son of Jehoshaphat, who was uncompromising in his love for us. Who refused to bow down and worship the devil to gain the kingdoms of the world. Who refused to bend to the Pharisees’ demands to follow their traditions rather than God’s commands. Who indeed was not swayed by appearances but truly taught the way of God. Who would rather go alone to the cross than abandon his mission of our salvation. Whose only alliance is to his own people, even though his own did not receive him.

Truly we need the Son of David, who would remain faithful to his faithless bride. Who would ransom us, who have often whored after other gods, from the power of Sheol and redeem us from death (Hos 13:14). Whose blood would wash his Church white as snow and present her to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing by the washing of water with the word (Ephesians 5:26–27).

And yet the Son of God did even more than simply stand by us when we were faithless. He chose his people despite her failings. We read in Hosea that he allures even us, his faithless bride. He brings us into the wilderness and speaks tenderly to us (Hosea 2:14). He says, “*You are my people,*” and shows mercy to us.

The Church and her Lord and Husband Christ are certainly strange bedfellows. We are by nature sinful and unclean. We look longingly at other gods, fascinated by what they offer. We have proven ourselves to be easily seduced by pleasures and willing even to betray our beloved when we feel pressured. And yet, Jesus would love his people and give himself up for her. He would bring us back to himself. He has joined himself to us, not even death to part.

The Son of Jehoshaphat Is Faithful to His People.

And so, despite what we see around us, that life is the art of compromise truly our life is not found in compromise. Rather our life is found in Jesus Christ's one-sided marriage alliance to us.

We are his unworthy bride. He is our faithful Husband who loves and cherishes us. This promise he has made on his own person, giving us the seal of Baptism. He has no split allegiances, and for this we offer the Son of David our whole hearts in faith and worship.

Amen