

2 Kings 3 // The Lesson's Not Been Learnt!

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[0:00] Second Kings, chapter 3, beginning at verse 1. Joram, son of Ahab, became king of Israel in Samaria in the 18th year of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and he reigned for twelve years.

He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, but not as his father and mother had done. He got rid of the sacred stone of Baal that his father had made. Nevertheless, he clung to the sins of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit.

He did not turn away from them. Now Mesha, king of Moab, raised sheep, and he had to pay the king of Israel a tribute of a hundred thousand lambs and the wool of a hundred thousand rams. But after Ahab died, the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel. So at that time, king Joram set out from Samaria and mobilized all Israel.

He also sent this message to Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. The king of Moab has rebelled against me. Will you go with me to fight against Moab?

[1:17] I will go with you, he replied. I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses.

By what route shall we attack, he asked. Through the desert of Edom, he answered. So the king of Israel set out with the king of Judah and the king of Edom.

After a roundabout march of seven days, the army had no more water for themselves or for the animals with them. What, exclaimed the king of Israel, has the Lord called us three kings together only to deliver us into the hands of Moab?

But Jehoshaphat asked, is there no prophet of the Lord here for whom we may inquire of the Lord? An officer of the king of Israel answered, Elisha, son of Shaphat, is here.

He used to pour water on the hands of Elijah. Jehoshaphat said, the word of the Lord is with him. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him.

[2:29] Elisha said to the king of Israel, why do you want to involve me? Go to the prophets of your father and the prophets of your mother. No, the king of Israel answered, because it was the Lord who called us three kings together to deliver us into the hands of Moab.

Elisha said, as surely as the Lord Almighty lives, whom I serve, if I did not have respect for the presence of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, I would not pay any attention to you.

But now bring me a harpist. While the harpist was playing, the hand of the Lord came on Elisha. And he said, this is what the Lord says.

I will fill this valley with pools of water. For this is what the Lord says. You will see neither wind nor rain. Yet this valley will be filled with water.

And you, your cattle and your other animals will drink. This is an easy thing in the eyes of the Lord. He will also deliver Moab into your hands.

[3:39] You will overthrow every fortified city and every major town. You will cut down every good tree, block up all the springs and ruin every good field with stones.

The next morning, about the time for offering the sacrifice, there it was. Water flowing from the direction of Edom. And the land was filled with water.

Now all the Moabites had heard that the kings had come to fight against them. So every man, young and old, who could bear arms, was called up and stationed on the border.

When they got up early in the morning, the sun was shining on the water. To the Moabites across the way, the water looked red, like blood.

That's blood, they said. Those kings must have fought and slaughtered each other. Now to the plunder Moab. But when the Moabites came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and fought them until they fled.

[4:43] And the Israelites invaded the land and slotted the Moabites. They destroyed the towns. And each man threw a stone on every good field until it was covered.

They stopped up all the springs and cut down every good tree. Only Kir Haraseth was left with its stones in place. But men armed with slings surrounded it and attacked it.

When the king of Moab saw that the battle had gone against him, he took with him 700 swordsmen to break through to the king of Edom. But they failed. Then he took his firstborn son, who was to succeed him as king, and offered him as a sacrifice on the city wall.

The fury against Israel was great. And they withdrew and returned through their own land. Well, good morning, St. Silas. Great to see you here. Let me add my welcome to Martins.

If we've not met before, my name's Andrew. I'm a leader in training here at the church. You should have got a service sheet on the way in. And if you turn that over, you'll find there aren't any points on it for our sermon.

[5:48] But let me reassure you, this is not a pointless sermon. The points will come up on the screen. And I trust that God will be at work as we look at his word. Do keep your Bibles open at page 369.

And as we get started this morning, let's come before him in prayer. Heavenly Father, thank you that you have chosen to reveal yourself to us through your word. And so we pray that as we consider your word together this morning, that you would help us to see you afresh, or perhaps for the very first time.

Help us to set aside the things of this world that might distract us, and drink deeply from your life-giving water. In Jesus' mighty name. Amen. Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you think you know someone really well, only for them to go and do something so surprising, it forces you to totally reconsider who they are, how well you know them.

Perhaps you hadn't known them as well as you thought. I had that experience at my very last school assembly. I left school at the end of S5, and we had a leaders assembly.

And this guy got up fairly nerdy, fairly socially awkward, pretty much kept himself to himself, the kind of person you would least expect to get up on stage in front of the school.

[7:12] And without really any comment, he proceeded to absolutely belt out, almost heaven, West Virginia, Blue Ridge Mountains, shadowing over a river.

Life is old there, older than the trees, younger than the mountains, growing like the breeze. Country roads, take me home to the place.

He was almost as bad a singer as I am. I mean, what possessed him? Who knew? None of us saw it coming. It would seem that after five years at school with him, I really didn't know him as well as I thought I did.

There was another side to him. I had to think again about who he was and what he was like. And perhaps this morning, as we come and look at God's word, we'll have something that we think about God, something we think we had down about him, we'll have to think again.

We've been in the books of one and two kings together, and we've been looking at the ministry of Elijah and Elisha as they have brought God's word to God's kings.

[8:19] God's people split into two after Solomon's reign in Israel. The northern kingdom turned their back on God and his chosen king. They set up their own worship of God, man-made worship.

And time after time, we have seen their kings cling to evil and reject the word of the Lord. They've led almost a whole nation astray by this point.

All of this, despite God consistently bringing his word through his prophets, calling them to turn back. And last week, we saw the end of Elijah's ministry as the baton was handed over to Elisha.

And so our first point this morning, we've got this down by now, verses one to 13. This is an ominous sign for Israel. Back in 1 Kings 19, verse 16, God instructs Elijah saying, anoint Jehu, son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha, son of Shaphat from Abel-Meholah, to succeed you as prophet.

Jehu will boot to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will boot to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. Yet I reserve 7,000 in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal.

[9:36] Elisha is a prophet, but he's also an assassin. And he's come to bring God's judgment on those who have turned away from him. And Elijah's ministry kicked off last week, and we got a glimpse of that judgment.

And so as he reappears today, we think, we've got this down. We know what's coming. It's judgment time on God's apostate people.

And verses one to three help us think that. We get the summary statement for Joram, which is just typical of the book of Kings. Glance at verse two with me. The author writes, It's not exactly a ringing endorsement of Joram to kick off.

He's a bit better than his dad Ahab. But when Ahab was introduced, we were told he's the evilest king so far. It's not looking great. And then verse three tells us, And it's worth pausing here and thinking just how bad a thing this is.

To follow Jeroboam is to continue to lead people away from their only hope of salvation, away from their only hope of being in relationship with God.

[11:12] It is akin to committing mass spiritual murder of the people under your care. Because the Lord does not accept false worship. We can't make the terms ourselves.

And so he takes them away, leads them away from the living God. And as Joram takes the throne, our drama kicks off in our passage this morning, Moab looks to take advantage of the political turmoil.

Verse five, The king of Moab stops paying his tribute of 100,000 lambs and 100,000 rams' will.

Does Joram really want his first act to be to go to war?

Yeah, he does. And so verse seven, he seeks help from Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. And Jehoshaphat goes, You know, Joram, I'm not really sure we see eye to eye on some quite important things.

You know, I think just theologically, we're quite separate. I maybe should sit this one out. No, he goes, I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses.

[12:16] Let's go. What is he thinking? Not even as much as a, let me ask God first what I should do. Perhaps I should listen to his word. And so they set out and they go south through Edom, handily picking up the king of Edom on the way.

And they walk for seven days until verse nine, they've completely run out of water in the middle of the desert of Edom. They've gone off by themselves, they've planned by themselves, and they've not taken enough water for their army.

And faced with an absolute disaster, Joram decides that he knows exactly who he can blame. God. Verse 10, he says, Has the Lord called us three kings together only to deliver us into the hands of Moab?

But hold on a second, Joram, you haven't asked what the Lord thinks of your plan. You haven't inquired of him up to this point. How do you know he called you?

How do you know that it's his fault when it all goes wrong? Now it's all gone wrong. It seems he thinks, let's wheel out the sovereignty of God argument and blame him.

[13:27] An evil king relying on himself, using his own wisdom goes to water. And so already, we're ready, we think we've got this down by now. We know what's coming. Here comes judgment.

And then finally, Jehoshaphat comes alive. Verse 11, he pipes up with, maybe we should inquire of the Lord. Has anyone seen a prophet kicking about? Anyone know someone who could bring the word of the Lord?

And so Elisha comes on scene. He is continuing Elijah's ministry. Jehoshaphat knows that. Hence verse 12, the word of the Lord is with him. And as we've seen throughout our time in Kings, the word of the Lord is powerful.

It is the guiding compass that God's kings are meant to live by as they seek to lead his people in relationship with him. And this time with no other option facing disaster, they finally turn to him.

And this is all very similar to 1 Kings 22 with the king of Ahab. And Joram's dad, Ahab, went down a very similar road with Jehoshaphat and Micaiah the prophet.

[14:34] Here's a table to help us see it. It's just straight out of, dig deeper into 1 and 2 Kings. Both times, a king of Israel asks Jehoshaphat for military assistance. And both times he says the exact same thing.

He's fully on board. Let's go. I'm with you. Both times it falls to Jehoshaphat to say, maybe we should ask the Lord. The first time he asks before they go. This time it's more of an afterthought. And in 1 Kings 22, Micaiah prophesies absolute devastation and the death of Ahab, which comes exactly to pass. 1 Kings 22 is an unmitigated disaster for God's people.

It goes horribly wrong and Ahab faces judgment. And so as we read of Jehoshaphat going down the same road, repeating it all over again, we are meant to think, we've got this down. It's a totally unsurprising crisis. Elisha the assassin is here. He's on the scene. Judgment will come. And when he's done, we'll only have 7,000 left in Israel.

[15:42] Now I know that we've all read ahead, so we know what happens. But our second point, might we have to think again about God's grace? Maybe he'll surprise you by how gracious he is, by the manner of his grace, by the nature of his grace.

Verse 14, Elisha agrees to consult God because of Jehoshaphat's presence. And what is the word that he receives? We're expecting judgment, but it's not that.

Instead, the Lord says, verse 17, you will see neither wind nor rain, yet this valley will be filled with water and you and your cattle and your other animals will drink.

The Lord is going to provide an absolute abundance of water. And he says, let's be very clear that this is a gracious gift from me. We'll have none of the usual shenanigans that you guys get up to where I provide what you're in need of, only for you to turn around and go, probably would have happened anyways, wouldn't it?

It's not real. It's not really got anything to do with God. Have you ever done that? You've been praying and asking God for something that you really want, you're nervous about, and when he provides it, it can be tempting just to think, well, it's pretty going to happen anyways.

[16:58] Like, it's a coincidence. I have a six-week-old at home, and so I find myself often praying for sleep, a lot. But then when she goes and sleeps really well, she sleeps well at night, I can wake up in the morning, and I'm tempted to go.

She's a baby. She sleeps like 18 hours a day. Andrew, in what world was she not going to sleep well? That's just how this works. And I can just skip over God's gracious provision in the small things and think that's just the world.

And maybe you do the same. Maybe you have a big work presentation coming up, and you're praying to God, asking for it to go well, and it goes well, and then you think, I am competent at my job.

I did work hard at this presentation. Of course it went well. Why wouldn't it have gone well? I just, I maybe didn't need to worry about it at all and completely skip over God's grace in the small things. Well, I wonder if God knows that Joram may well do the exact same thing here. If the wind picks up and the clouds come in, he might just go, ah, that's just geography.

[18:05] That's how the world works. I put BBC Breakfast on this morning. I saw the weather forecast and they were talking about the low weather pressure system coming in. So of course the rain has appeared. No divine intervention to see here at all.

God says, I know exactly what you're like. I won't give you that out. You'll have to acknowledge my gracious provision for you will see neither wind nor rain. And he goes on, this is an easy thing in the eyes of the Lord.

He will also deliver Moab into your hands. Providing water for them to drink is a small thing for God and so gracious is he that he'll deliver them victory in battle as well.

But before we move on to that, let's just pause here and think. For many of us this morning, the idea that our God is a gracious God, we're fully on board with. I'm on board.

God is gracious. Amen. I get it. But let me ask you, do you recognize God's grace in the small things in your life as well as the big things?

[19:08] Or has your view of grace become that it's just the big things in life that God provides? His forgiveness and salvation, God's grace. The smaller things, well often they kind of just happen.

Is he really involved in that? Is he really interested? Do I really give that to him and attribute it to him? But he is involved. It is his grace. Just because it's an easy thing for him to do doesn't mean that he doesn't do it at all.

And so let's be people who look out for his grace in all of our lives, in the big things and the small things, knowing that he is in control of it all and he cares. There is nothing too easy for him.

And then the big thing, delivering victory against Moab. God promises them a resounding victory and graciously delivers it through his provision of water.

The provision of water is a double grace. The Moabites have assembled, the whole nation are ready and when they wake up in the morning, verse 22, the sun was shining on the water.

[20:13] To the Moabites across the way, the water looked red like blood. To them, it's perfectly possible that this slightly dodgy alliance of three kings has ended very badly and they've all slaughtered each other.

And there's been no clouds and there's been no wind. So why would it be water? Where would the water come from? And so that's what they see. What else could it possibly be? And they rush out, ready to gather all the plunder, thinking they've hit the jackpot, only to find, verse 24, the Israelites alive and well, ready to inflict the devastating defeat on them.

Right up to and including their capital, Kir Harseth, in verse 25. God is exceptionally gracious to Israel in delivering success for them here.

God gives an undeserved, unexpected victory to a completely unworthy king. When everything is pointed towards judgment and disaster, God, through his messenger, brings his word to bear and saves.

God saves through water and blood just like he did in Exodus, just like he does for us today in Christ. Jesus sheds his blood on the cross paying the price for our sin to save unworthy people like you and me and symbolized through the waters of baptism as we go down into death, he raises us back up again.

[21:40] God saves through water and blood and that is the ultimate act of our gracious God and whereas in Jehoshaphat's presence only granted a sinner like Joram into the, to hear God's word, the Lord Jesus kingship as the true king, the great king allows us to enter the very throne room of God.

Jesus Christ is the lamb who was slain, who shed his blood for us so that we can have relationship with God, we can enter in and he does that even though we do not deserve it but it is freely given. Growing up, we had a CD from the kids songs from Spring Harvest that we often put on in road journeys and one of them just, all it did was distinguish between grace and mercy and it said, grace is when God gives us the things we don't deserve and mercy is when God does not give us the things we deserve.

I'm sure you've heard similar expressions but we can go a step further than that I think and say that grace isn't just getting God's unmerited blessing, it's that we get demerited blessing.

It's not just that we don't deserve it, it's that we actively deserve the opposite, we're not neutral, we're on the completely other end of the scale and yet so great is God's grace that he saves us from a death we certainly deserve to an eternal life that we certainly do not deserve.

[23:17] Our God is so gracious and so let me ask you this morning, St Silas, might you need to consider God's grace again in your life? Have you shrunk it down?

Have you limited its scope? It's only in the big things, it's not in the small things. It's not big enough to cover the sin in my lives. Our God is so gracious, his grace is so great and yet that's not how 2 Kings chapter 3 ends.

We still have a couple of verses to deal with. Wouldn't this be a great gospel sermon that we'd all happily get behind that we don't deserve it, God saves us?

Brilliant. Very true. But our third point, might we have to consider God's wrath again? Verses 26 and 27.

We've got two more verses to deal with and these verses are very much the kick in the tail of 2 Kings 3. The king of Moab fails in his last ditch attempt to break through in verse 26.

[24:24] And just in case any of us were starting to feel sorry for the Moabites in their total defeat, look at what the king does next. Verse 27. Then he took his firstborn son who was to succeed him as king and offered him as a sacrifice on the city wall.

A despicable, horrendous, barbaric act of child sacrifice to appease their false God who doesn't exist. And then a very odd thing happens next.

Keep reading verse 27. The fury against Israel was great. They withdrew and returned to their own land. More literally, the wrath against Israel was great.

So great that they had to retreat. And so the obvious question for us is whose wrath? Whose wrath has come upon the Israelites?

The author doesn't directly tell us. The commentators all do different things with it. But there are some options. Could it be the wrath of Chemosh, the Moabite god?

[25:33] Has the sacrifice of the crown prince finally provoked him to anger and he's going to get in on the battle? That seems unlikely, very unlikely.

Throughout the whole of kings we have seen that idols and false gods are totally useless. They're dead. They cannot do anything. Not that long ago Elijah showed us that Baal can't even light a twig on fire during the greatest drought that they'd had in years.

Chemosh isn't doing anything here. It's not his wrath. No, it seems that it's God's wrath. Could it be that despite his very gracious provision he is still profoundly angry at Israel?

Despite the fact that he showed them grace he is very much against them. According to his word he performed a great miracle that they had to attribute to him demonstrating his power and his willingness to save but they've not changed.

We might be tempted to think that God has relented and decided to be gracious instead in place of his wrath but no God is very set on bringing his righteous wrath upon sinful humans.

[26 : 53] He is very set on the price of sin being paid. And if you were in Israel at this time you'd probably think things are going quite well for you.

They're a powerful nation. The Moabites were sending 100,000 lambs and 100,000 rams wolves as a large tribute. Clearly economically they're on the up.

Politically they're significantly powerful. They've got a massive army they've just got a big victory.

They're very wealthy. And so maybe they're inclined to think we've called God's bluff.

He kept sending us prophets telling us about judgment but I mean he seems to just be keeping on graciously blessing us. Maybe actually God's grace means that his wrath isn't so important.

Maybe it's not even there at all. His grace overrides that to the extent that there will be no wrath. But that is completely wrong.

[27 : 54] Despite all the prophets have been saying to them they've ignored it and although God delivered them in battle he has spared them for now not spared them forever. So we could read this chapter and think God has saved them eternally despite their sin he has rescued them fully.

But we can't say that because in chapter 8 and onwards it turns into a massive blood bath as God executes his judgment on sinful evil Israel who refused to turn back to him.

The assassins arrive and truly it is judgment time at that point and the time to respond to God's grace for them is over. Elisha who brings God's word of gracious deliverance is also the assassin that executes God's wrath and judgment on sin.

And Elisha is a foreshadow of Jesus Christ the lamb who was slain who gives us eternal life and brings us into the throne room is also the one who rides out on the white horse coming to bring God's wrath upon the nations.

He is the lamb who has been slain. He is the horse rider executing the wrath. He will bring judgment on those who despite God's grace cling to evil like Joram.

[29 : 14] There is a period now where salvation through Christ is possible. But there is a time coming where it will be a bloodbath. Where everyone found to be clinging to evil instead of God will face God's judgment.

And so 2 Kings 3 invites us to think again about God's wrath. It tells us that it's possible for us to be experiencing God's gracious blessing now and for God to still be profoundly against us.

It's possible for us to emphasize the grace of God so much that we completely lose sight of his judgment and his wrath. That we think he is so gracious that his wrath just won't happen.

You'll find another way. He wouldn't actually judge humanity. And that might make us think that our sin doesn't matter. That it doesn't matter what we do because God's grace overrides it.

And so maybe today you need to think again about God's wrath and make sure that we're not becoming complacent in his grace and so still clinging to evil.

[30 : 28] If we emphasize God's grace so much at the expense of the other attributes of God, we can be at a risk of thinking I've got sin in my life.

But it doesn't really matter what I do with it. There's not really going to be wrath coming. God's grace is sufficient. I need not try and remove it. I'll just sit easy. As evangelicals, we can major so much on God's grace that we lose sight of God's impending judgment.

I remember having a conversation with a mate, not a Christian at all, who just couldn't wrap his head around the idea that grace wasn't a pass to do whatever I wanted.

One day he said to me, Andrew, I just don't understand. Why does it matter what you do? It sounds to me like your God says you can just do whatever you want and if you ask for forgiveness, you'll be fine.

Sounds like you could just have a bit of fun and say sorry for it afterwards. Just relax. You know God's going to forgive you, so why on earth does it matter? And instead of my bumbling response, whatever it was, I can't remember, how I wish that I spoke of God's wrath.

[31:43] How I spoke of how we cannot just think that God's grace means it doesn't matter what we do because God is set on bringing wrath against sin and if we're still clinging to evil instead of to Christ, we're in real trouble.

perhaps it's an unbalanced view of God's grace and wrath that means we don't take our sin as seriously as we should. Perhaps it's a lack of belief that God will really judge this world that means that we don't cross that pain threshold and tell our friends about the looming judgments and do all that we can to save them from it, to share the gospel with those we love or take a drastic action to cut off our love of sin.

St. Silas, when we turn to Christ and we humbly repent, his grace is more than sufficient for all of our sin. But we mustn't keep clinging to the evil of that sin like Joram did.

We turn fully to Christ and cling to him. God's grace is more abundant than we remember, than we can understand, so we need to keep reconsidering his grace, its nature, its manner, its extent.

And his wrath is more certain to fall than often we believe. And so we must keep reconsidering that as well. Let's be people who cling closely to the Lord Jesus Christ and not cling to evil.

[33:09] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we praise you for who you are, our gracious God who longs to see all saved into a relationship with you, and our holy God who detests evil and promises to bring judgment upon our broken world.

We thank you for this time now that you have given us, where your gift of eternal life is available to all, thanks to the work of Jesus. And we pray that as we await his coming, you would help us to see the fullness of your grace in our lives, and the reality of your wrath that is coming against evil.

Help us to be people who do not presume upon your grace, nor cling to the evil of the world, but instead seek to honor you in all that we do. In Jesus' name.

Amen.