

We Three Kings

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[0 : 0 0] Our Bible reading for this morning is taken from 2 Kings chapter 3. You can find it on page 369 of the Church Bible. Page 369.

Joram, son of Ahab, became king of Israel in Samaria in the 18th year of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and he reigned for 12 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 Meshach, king of Moab, raised sheep, and he had to pay the king of Israel a triad of a hundred thousand lambs and the wool of a hundred thousand rams.

But 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.

[1 : 1 7] He also sent his message to Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. The king of Moab has rebelled against me. Would you go with me to fight against Moab? I will go with you, he replied.

I am as you are. My people as your people. My horses as your horses. By what rule 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 runabout match 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 through 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 asked, The word of the Lord is with him.

[2 : 3 1] So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him. 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 asked, 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.

[3 : 3 4] 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.

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 a 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.

[4 : 34] That's blood, they said. Those kings must have fought and slaughtered each other. Now to the plumber, Moab. But when the Moabites came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and fought them until they fled.

And the Israelites invaded the land and slaughtered 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 Keharisheth 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 sword men 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.

[5 : 43] They withdrew and returned to their own land. This is the word of God. Great. Well, lovely to see you all this morning.

Thank you so much for sticking around over half term. What a brilliant morning it is to be here. And thank you to Angela and Alan for leading us our prayers and intercessions, and Darren for leading, and John for the music.

What a great morning it's been so far. My name is James. I'm the curator at St. Silas, and I'll be preaching to us this morning from 2 Kings 3. Right. Let me start in prayer before we start.

Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for this astounding story. Please use it now to teach us, to speak to us of how we should be your people.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, if you're new to St. Silas this morning, we've been going through a little series in 2 Kings entitled Big Fight Live.

[6 : 47] And we've named the series this because the book of Kings, the God of the Bible is demonstrating that he is the only true God, that he alone controls all of history, that no other God is worthy of worship because they are no gods.

So it is a fight between Yahweh, that is the God of the Bible, whenever you see L-O-R-D in capital letters, that's Yahweh being used there, and these no gods, these pretender gods.

And we remember the context of the book of Kings, that is the people of God, they'd received these great promises, they'd received these promises, that they would be the people of God, that they would occupy a place, a country, and that they would have a king.

But at the end of the book of the Kings, what do we see? But the people being exiled out of Jerusalem, into Babylon, into captivity.

And you might remember the Boney M song, by the rivers of Babylon, where we wept, as they remembered Jerusalem, and the temple there, and how that had been utterly destroyed in the conquest.

[8 : 05] They were no longer in God's place. God's king was nowhere to be seen. And so the question in 2 Kings is, will they continue to be the people of God?

Will they stay faithful to God? Or will they defect and follow the pagan gods of Babylon? So what has become of God's promises?

Is God really God? And does he even care? And so the writer of the book of Kings looks back at this catastrophic event, this exile, and he tries to explain the reason for these events.

He tries to answer those questions that the people may have been asking. And so the book of Kings is really a book about the human heart. It asks, will our hearts remain faithful to God?

Or will we let them wander and follow the pagan gods of 21st century Babylon? And now the reason that the author gives to why these disasters came on the Old Testament people of Israel is that they gave up worshipping the God of the Bible.

[9 : 16] They stopped listening to him and they started listening to other people, to other gods. They rejected God's word and they went elsewhere.

So whose words are you listening to today? Are you listening to the God of the Bible's words? Or are you listening listening to the 21st pagan Baals of Babylon that are around you as we go around today?

So if we're taking notes, we're under our first point there, like father, like son. Well, the story starts with a new king on the throne of Samaria. That's the capital of the northern kingdom, Israel, and his name is Joram.

And that is opposed to Jerusalem, which is the capital of the southern kingdom, Judah. And if you're a Lord of the Rings fan, it's kind of like the northern king's Rehan and then the southern king of Gondor.

And so in the first verse there, we're introduced to Joram, who is the son of Ahab. And it's a bit of a mixed introduction, isn't it? See, on the one hand, he does only little evil compared to his parents.

[10 : 29] So he turns away from the sacred stones of Baal that his mother and father had made. But on the other hand, he still clings to the idols that Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, had set up.

And you may well remember those were two golden calves that he set up in the northern kingdom as opposed to where people should go and worship, one in Bethel, one in Dan, so that people didn't go to the temple to worship, but instead worshipped these idols.

And so often is the case with any kind of change of leadership, there's a potential power vacuum and things become uncertain, unclear.

What's the new king going to be like? And into this situation, King Misha, king of Mer, whom David had conquered many, many years before, decides he's going to seize the opportunity to stop paying taxes and rebel against the king of Israel.

So it's like father, like son. We remember how Ahab fatally attacked Ramoth Gilead, the capital of the rebel king of Syria, in 1 Kings 22. So we read here how his son, Joram, attacks Misha, the rebel king of Moab.

[11 : 47] And if you are old enough to remember, it's a bit like George Bush Sr. and George W. Bush Jr., both heading off attacking Iraq different times.

And again, the king of Israel calls upon Jehoshaphat, the God-fearing king of the southern kingdom of Judah for allies. And again, Jehoshaphat dutifully replies, well, my horses are as your horses.

And so it's a bit like going back to Lord of the Rings. It's like Rohan going down to Gondor saying, look, are you going to buddy up with me? And shall we go attack Mordor? And of course, Gondor says, yes, of course, I'll go along with you.

And so off they go. And so the king of Israel, Joram, marches out of the capital, Samaria, with great pomp, great fanfare, mustering his allies.

He's got the king of Judah. He's got Judah's vassal state, the kingdom of Edom. And they debate about what route they should take, already assured that they're going to have this victory that they're thinking about.

[12 : 50] But only these three kings don't get very far when they realize that they've forgotten the most important bit in this whole little endeavor.

And maybe you can emphasize, so you pack the car to go on a family holiday, you put the lunch, you prepare the lunch, and then you leave and you forget the lunch in the house.

Or you leave the keys for the accommodation, the house that you're going to stay in, in your old house. And you've gone off and you've left the most important bit behind.

So you see, unlike the father Ahab's earlier campaign, before setting off in this campaign, they have not set off, they have not inquired of the Lord before setting off.

So we're on our second point there, a generous, saving word. And the folly of this mistake becomes painfully apparent in the most embarrassing of situations in verse 9.

[13 : 57] So verse 9, so the king of Israel set out with the king of Judah and the king of Edom, and after a roundabout march, that's a euphemism for getting lost in the desert, of seven days, the army had no more water for themselves or for their animals with them.

Three kings lost in a desert without water. It's a pitiful situation. It's almost comical how badly it's going at this point.

And then the surprise here is that in verse 10, the king of Israel exclaims, Joram goes, what? Has the Lord called us three kings together only to deliver us into the hands of Moab?

And this grumbling here echoes the grumbling of the people in the desert under Moses. You might remember that. And it also echoes the grumbling of the people who have gone into exile in Babylon.

Has the Lord abandoned us in Babylon? And it maybe echoes some of our sentiments here this morning. So, is God doing His job?

[15 : 10] I've been following Him, but look at me. And my life is hard. What is the point of it? If God loves me and cares for me, then why do these things happen that have happened?

What is the point of God who only denies me the things that I want now and then only lets bad things happen to me? And so, we see it displaying a startling lack of faith.

And so, very often, we react against and reject a God that looks completely different to how the Bible portrays God. That is, rather than us serving God, we seek God to serve us.

And instead, we live our lives in our own way, building our own kingdoms. and we never actually inquire after the God of the Bible.

And so, as every king of Israel should do, according to Deuteronomy 17, rather, the Joram calls upon Joram, although he calls upon the Lord, demonstrates that he is clueless regarding the Lord.

[16 : 23] He's got no knowledge of the Lord. And so, Jehoshaphat, that's the king of Judah, he asks the rather awkward question at this point. He goes, well, is there not a prophet of the Lord of whom we might inquire?

And you know he's half expecting the answer, well, no, I actually forgot to bring one from Joram. But instead, he just gets a complete blank look back from Joram.

And then eventually, one of Joram's officials, officers jumps in and he says, oh, my master, Elisha, son of Shaphat, is here. You remember, he used to pour water on the hands of Elijah, the prophet.

And Jehoshaphat goes, well, yes, the word of the Lord is with him. And so, if these kings are going to have any hope in escaping this hopeless situation, this hopeless muddle that they've got into, they're going to have to rely on the word of the Lord.

And of course, Joram is entirely clueless as to who Elijah is. And the whole conversation goes over his head. And so, sure enough, the three kings go down to see Elisha.

[17 : 43] And at first, it seems very, well, unsatisfactory meeting for the king of Israel. So Elisha says, why do you want to involve me? Why don't you go to the prophets of your father and the prophets of your mother?

And it seems as though Elisha is, well, directly contradicting himself because we remember that Elisha had said to Joram's elder brother, Ahaziah, in the first chapter, first chapter of 1 Kings, is that, is it because there's no God in Israel that you're sending messages to consult Baalzebub, the God of Ekron?

Therefore, you will certainly die. And so, Elisha had rebuked Joram's older brother for not seeking the Lord.

But here, when Joram comes to seek the Lord, to seek his prophet, he says to him that he should rather go to the other prophets. So it's as if Elisha is asking Joram, faced with a hopeless situation, whose word will you listen to?

Are you going to go to the prophets of Baal? Or are you going to follow the words of the Lord through his prophet, Elisha?

[19 : 07] And as we sit here this morning, the question is the same for us. Whose word will we listen to? Will we listen to the word of the Lord as set out in the Bible?

Or will we listen to the words of 21st century Babylon in Glasgow this morning? Where do we find our hope and satisfaction? Do we find it in God, in his word, or in the world?

In sex? In money? In career? In escapism? Any kind of fantasy that's out there? In your holidays maybe?

Is that where you find your satisfaction? Is it that your ultimate ethic is your own self-expression of your desires? And that anyone that tells you different to that, well they're just a morally bad person?

Or is it that your ultimate ethic is governed by the word of God in the Bible? Well the king of Israel says no, because it was the Lord who called us three kings together to deliver us into the hands of Moab.

[20 : 19] And you can see the logic in this verse. Well, Joram says it was the Lord who got us into this mess, he should get us out of this mess. And of course he's totally stepping back from any kind of responsibility in this issue.

It's the Lord's fault, it's not my fault, I haven't rejected, I've been a good king. When he's never, he's displayed that he's absolutely clueless on the Lord.

And so Elisha answers Joram with the most chilling words you'd never want to hear said to you by a man of God, namely, as surely as the Lord Almighty lives whom I serve, I would not pay any attention to you.

But even in these chilling words there is hope. And so he says, if I did not have respect for the presence of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, then I'd not pay any attention to you.

And so the Lord gives his answer through Elisha in verse 16. And I wonder if you'll just look down there. So he goes, if this is what the Lord says, I will fill this valley with pools of water, you will see neither wind nor rain, yet this valley will be filled with water, and your cattle and your animals will drink.

- [21 : 39] This is an easy thing in the eyes of the Lord. He will also deliver Moab into your hands. You will overthrow every fortified city and every major town.
- You'll cut down every good tree, stop up all the springs, and ruin every good field with stones. It's amazing the generosity of the Lord here.
- But I wonder if you noticed where the source of the water is that God is going to give. You see, he says, you will see neither wind nor rain.
- That is, the Lord is going to give the water in a way that demonstrates that it's God who gives it. It's not Baal who gives it.
- So we remember Baal is the fertility God, or the storm God. Whoever gets the rain gets the crop. God is making it absolutely clear here.
- [22 : 38] There are going to be no storms, but there will still be water to prove that he is the God, even in Moab, that he can deliver and save his people.
- And so when God works in our lives and answers our prayers, he does this so as to further his glory, that people may know that he is God and what kind of God that he is.
- And so he delights to answer our prayers that speak of his glory. And notice the overwhelming generosity of the Lord. It's not that he's only going to send water.
- That thing is an easy thing in the eyes of the Lord. But he promises a whole-scale victory over the Moabites. He will also deliver Moab into your hands.
- And so Joram was complaining to Elisha. He was saying, well, no, why has the Lord given these three kings into the hands of Moab? But look at what the Lord says through Elisha.
- [23 : 44] No, no, no, you've got that wrong. Not only am I going to rescue you from this horrible mess that you've got yourself into and send you water, but I'm going to give the Moabites into your hands.
- I am more generous than you could ever imagine. And so friends, maybe some of us this morning find ourselves in horrible messes in our lives and we wonder how there's going to be any hope for friendship, for families, for relationships.
- And maybe you're tempted to think God doesn't care. But look at what the author of two kings is saying. He's saying, oh, no, no, no, no, no. You think God is a God of small things.
- No. He is a God of miracles. He's a God of superabundant generosity. Don't you see that? Why do you look for your abundance and life and satisfaction outside of this God?
- And so by His generous saving word, the Lord gives water. And we read there in verse 20, the next morning about the time for the offering, the sacrifice, there it was, water flowing from the direction of Edom.
- [25 : 00] And the land was filled with water. And so we move on to our third point there, the blood that saves. So the day arrived, the day for the big battle, and every able-bodied Moabite came out, everyone who was able to fight, from the youngest to the oldest, anyone who could carry a sword or a shield, was summoned to fight.
- The Israelites were coming, it's the Moabite Stalingrad, everyone forward. And on the day of the great battle, they woke up, and early, and wait, what's that?
- It looks like blood. What do you think's happened? Those daft kings must be fighting one another, and they've slaughtered each other. The valley's red with blood, chaps.
- Come on, let's have them. And meanwhile, the Israelites, having had their drink of water, awake, refreshed, they eat their breakfast, they check the weather forecast, they don their armor, and then they look up, and, ah, wait, is that not the Moabites running towards us?
- They're all over the place. They look a mess. I can't believe this. This is going to be a doddle, victory on a plate. Battle lines, boys. Hashtag, the Moabites are coming.

[26 : 21] Lol. So just as Moses had demonstrated the Lord's supremacy over the Egyptian fertility gods by turning the Nile into blood, Sir Elisha, the prophet of the law, as it were, turns water seemingly into blood to show the Lord's supremacy over the gods of Moab.

And the carnage that follows is total. All that Elisha had prophesied had taken place according to the word of the Lord.

And the account ends with this desperate, failed, final attack by Misha, the king of Moab, verse 26. And then this puzzling story in verse 27 that is shockingly horrendous, a sacrifice by Misha of his son.

Now what that sacrifice means and what verse 27, whatever it does mean, we're not perhaps 100% sure, but it certainly does not mean that Baal, the pagan gods, delivered Misha in response to his sacrifice.

They're not real gods. They do not exist. There's only one god in the Bible, the Lord, Yahweh. But it's probably rather voicing the disgust of the Israelites at seeing the sacrifice happen on the gates.

[27 : 48] And so here's the author, Del Rolf Davis, he writes, verse 27 is a picture of seeking God in paganism. You have to coerce and manipulate, perhaps in the most costly way, even though not very faithful Israelites are repulsed and horrifying.

Do you see the message to Israel here? It's as if Yahweh is saying, see where pagan gods go in their desperation. See where paganism leads to.

Do you savvy at all the matchless gift that you have in a God who lives and hears and speaks and delivers without bribery?

And it's the same with our 21st century paganism. Do we see where that will lead us? that whatever your idol is, that is where it's going to lead you.

If it's work, you'll work so hard that you'll sacrifice your family, your relationships, your friendships on that altar. If it's pleasure, you'll pursue pleasure and you'll destroy your life upon it.

[28 : 58] And if you are your own idol, you'll be so insecure about yourself that your life will implode. Everyone will be there to serve you. That idol will destroy your life.

And this abhorrence and disgusting, as this image is, of the sacrifice by measure is nothing less than a self-seeking perversion of how God the Father offers up and sacrifices His Son that washes away our sins and turns aside the Father's wrath.

life. You see, how does Joram, although he was hopeless and helpless, how is it that Joram, this king of Israel, he's clueless, is rescued in this passage?

Can you see that it's only because someone else speaks for him on his behalf? He gets the benefits because of someone else, because of Jehoshaphat, the king in David's line.

So here's Davis again, and it's the same with you. If you receive any benefit from God, it is because you stand next to the Davidic king, Jesus, the descendant of David and Jehoshaphat.

[30 : 20] You are in exactly the same place as Joram. You don't deserve heaven's crumbs, but you receive massive mercies only because of Jesus.

The Davidic king stands beside you. So what about you? Well, in many ways, this is an incredibly frustrating chapter of the Bible.

It ends in a frustrating way. Do our heroes win? Well, presumably, it looks like that, but not quite. And then if you look at the chapter from Joram's perspective, it's even more frustrating.

So Joram, the king of Israel, he comes to the throne, but Moab rebels. He launches a retaliation, but runs out of water. He goes to God's prophets, but he gets rebuked.

He receives a double promise of provision and victory, but it seems as though this victory never quite gets there. Everything is not quite. And you see, that is the point about Joram.

[31 : 25] Joram is frustrating. Joram, is not quite. You see, he turns away from the bowel worship, but he still clings to Jeroboam's golden calves.

And sadly, it might be that for a number of us here this morning, we might be not quite. In some areas of our Christian life, we might be enormously victorious, but in other areas, we're still clinging to behaviors and beliefs that we know are inconsistent with our faith.

And so the question for the Israelites in the exile was, who will they listen to? Whose word will they take seriously? The Israelites in the exile were trying to understand how they got into that mess.

Where was God in all this? And the book of Kings answers, God was always near, but you simply ignored his word.

what else did you expect? And so as we sit here this morning, the truth is, we are either hearing or we are hardening our hearts to this word.

[32 : 38] We're either hearing God's word, that is we're trying to understand it, we're trying to obey it, we're trying to trust it, we're trying to apply it to our hearts, or we are hardening our hearts to God's word.

maybe not in an obvious gross kind of way, but maybe in a simple meh, not quite kind of way. We're hardening our hearts to those bits of God's word that we don't want to hear.

We're not repenting where we should be, but we're only listening to and quoting those bits that are our favorite passages, those purple passages that we go to to seek God and his word only as a convenience.

when we're in an emergency, we treat God's word like an airbag to be used in disasters and packed away in the cupboard the rest of the time.

But failing to see and treat God as a God to be loved and adored at all times, who is generous beyond our wildest dreams, who hears his people, who is near to his people like no other God, God, and in whose glory we share as we glorify him in his son.

[33 : 57] So, Father, we thank you for these words. We thank you for these two kings. Father, we thank you for Jehoshaphat, great King Jesus' great, great, great grandfather.

We thank you for the blessing that we enjoy in him. Father, please may we turn from our sins. Please may we seek you anew. Please may we learn to love your word more each and every day.

Amen. Amen.