

2 Kings 3

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[0 : 00] Turn with me again to 2 Kings 3. In this chapter we have the account of the armies of Israel going into battle with Mesha, who is the king of Moab.

But something goes wrong, doesn't it? Verse 9, when the army had made a march for seven days, there was no water for the army or for the animals.

That is the problem at the centre of this chapter. That is the problem that sparks off the events of this chapter. Israel has run out of water. Israel is thirsty.

And this evening I want to speak to thirsty people. I want to speak to you if you're looking to quench a thirst this evening, if you need refreshments, not just for your body on what's been a hot week, but for your soul, your thirst for life.

God wants to tell you that he is here to quench that thirst. And what Israel discovers is that he is the God who does that in this chapter, and that God does that in a way that is more than we expect, more than we ask for, and more than we deserve.

[1 : 17] They are thirsty. But look at the punchline in verse 20. The next morning, about the time of the offering, the sacrifice, behold, water came from the direction of Edom, till the country was filled with water.

If you're thirsty tonight, the God of Israel, the God of the Bible, is calling to you that you make him your God, that you trust in him as your God.

First of all, because God gives you more than you expect. The God of Israel gives you more than you expect. What does King Jehoram expect from God?

He's the latest in the line of kings that we've been looking at, isn't he? And his expectations of God are at least higher than his parents were. Verses one to three.

He's not like his father and mother, Ahab and Jezebel, is he? So we're told that he puts away the pillar of Baal, this false god that his father had made and constructed.

[2 : 26] He's effectively saying, I no longer expect the false god Baal to quench my thirst for life. Baal is not going to satisfy me or my people anymore.

But there's an inconsistency in his expectations. Whilst he doesn't expect much from Baal, neither does he expect much from the Lord.

Because verse two, he puts away this Baal pillar. Yet verse three, he clings on to the sins of Jeroboam, who was another king before him. He did not depart from them.

So on the one hand, he puts Baal away. But on the other hand, he clings to these perhaps more subtle sins, the sins of Jeroboam. And he clung to them.

It's a strong word. It's the same word that's used of Adam clinging on to his wife in Genesis two. So he gets rid of the big obvious evil in Baal.

[3 : 28] But he cherishes other evils instead. It's a clever little turn of phrase in the original that he turned away.

But actually, he didn't turn away. Away from some big things, but not away from other things. And it tells us, doesn't it, deep down what Jehoram expects from God.

What he prizes most in his life. What he expects most from that he thinks will bring him most joy. Well, it isn't Baal.

It's not those outward sins. But he is clinging to some other things, isn't he, inwardly. And inwardly, he has low expectations of God.

Look with me a bit later. When it comes to the water crisis, they're thirsty. And Jehoram reveals his expectations. He reveals his attitude in verse 10.

[4 : 29] Alas, the Lord has called these three kings to give them into the hand of Moab. Him, Jehoshaphat, and the king of Edom, who he was allied with. And it's a kind of false sense of piety

there.

Because he uses his theology of God's sovereignty there, doesn't he? The Lord has brought this upon us. This is God's will. But he uses it in a tellingly pessimistic way.

A hopeless way. Rather than resting in and trusting in that sovereignty, he blames it. This is God's doing.

And we are doomed. He's brought us here to kill us. He's got quite low expectations of God's goodness, hasn't he? He jumps to that conclusion.

God is just waiting. He's just on the edge of his seat to destroy us. He's brought us here to show his bitterness. It's just like Israel did when they came out from the land of Egypt, from slavery.

[5 : 29] Do you remember? At the first sign of trouble, they blamed God, didn't they? They spoke to Moses. But really, they were blaming God in Exodus 14. Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you brought us out into the wilderness to die here?

This is so typical of you, Lord. We imagine sometimes that God just can't wait to make life more difficult for us. That he's leading us down the paths that will remove joy and make life worse.

I've never expected much from God because I think this is what he's like. And so he doesn't satisfy.

So we rid the big evils, the obvious evils in our lives.

But deep down, we don't expect much from God. So we cling to some other idols that are perhaps more quiet in our lives. And his low expectations of God have led him to go to sin instead, haven't they?

The sins of Jeroboam. And the more he's done that, the more fearful he is of God and the more darkness there is in his life and the more hatred there is of God.

[6 : 43] And perhaps this is the thought process, or if there is any thought in the process, when we cling to other gods. We take a moment, don't we?

We compare life. What life we imagine is going to be like without that little idol. All that sin in our lives. And we think it's going to be so much worse.

We compare what we think that sin will give us with what we expect God is for us and what God can give us. And we make a decision. And that decision reveals what we expect from God.

And often, shamefully, it's not much, is it? We live on a moment-by-moment basis. And we think to ourselves, the pleasures of turning away from God outweigh knowing him and having him.

And they are pleasures, aren't they? Let's be honest about it. They are pleasures. Pleasures. But only for a moment. They're not pleasures that last, are they? Do you know, I've never clung to an idol.

[7 : 48] I've never trusted in a false god. And for the next day, or even in the next moment, I feel so satisfied that I've done that. The moment-by-moment pleasures of trusting in things or in things that beef up my pride or that kind of initial relief of letting rip at someone in anger.

Of engaging in a lustful thought or feeding an envy. I've never thought, after doing any of those things, after even a moment, that is really worth doing.

That was really satisfying. Really worthwhile. I feel my thirst quenched now for life. Never thought that. Because you always need another one, don't you?

It never quite is enough. And yet, for Israel, for Jehoram, this king, there was water. Israel's thirst is quenched here.

They get more than they expect from God. He gives us, he gives them more than they expect.

Secondly, though, he gives you more than you ask for.

[9 : 05] He gives you more than you ask for. He is more than you ask for. And when they're in a bind, they go to God, don't they, finally? And King Jehoshaphat is there again.

He is slightly foolish, isn't he? But he's still pious and he wants to know what the Lord says about this situation. Jehoram is all doom and gloom. The Lord's got it in for us again.

But look at Jehoshaphat in verse 11. Is there no prophet of the Lord of whom we may inquire? And then they bring out Elisha. We don't know why Elisha's there, but they're in a bind, aren't they?

And Jehoram wants an answer to the Moab problem. They're going to kill us. And really, it's a prayer of desperation. God here is really the last resort.

But look at the way God answers that prayer. Verse 16. Thus says the Lord, I will make this dry stream bed full of pools. You shall not see wind or rain, but that stream bed shall be filled with water so that you shall drink.

[10:15] You, your livestock and your animals. And just look at the kind of quantity words there. The stream bed will be full of pools. The stream bed shall be filled with water so that not only you, Jehoram, not even only you and your livestock, but you, your livestock and your animals shall drink.

God answers, doesn't he? But when he answers, he over answers. He doesn't just give enough, does he? But more than enough. It's a fullness.

It's an abundance. God gives Jehoram more than he asks for. But there is even more than that.

More than he asks for or even imagines.

It's not just an abundance, but an overabundance. Look at verse 18. But this is a light thing in the sight of the Lord.

He will also give the Moabites into your hands. And verse 19 and 20. He's not just going to quench your thirst in the moment, but secure peace for good from the Moabites.

[11:29] All the Moabite springs will be stopped. Their land is going to be ruined and their choice cities will be yours to attack. They ask. And God gives more than they ask.

Way more. There's a super abundance of grace, isn't there? Notice the words. It's too light a thing in the Lord's sight that I give you water.

It's as if the Lord is saying to him, isn't it? What you've asked for is too small a thing, Jehoram. It's too easy. Too small a request.

It's too trivial. Giving enough water to quench the thirst of three armies and all their animals and all their livestock. It's just a little stocking filler.

It's just a little token. You're not asking big enough, Jehoram. You're coming to someone that you don't expect much from. But I am not Baal. I am not like one of your little idols.

[12:35] I am the Lord. And what you're asking for isn't lavish enough. And I'm going to show you that. It reminds us of Isaiah 49.

Those words, it is too light a thing. The Lord says something similar in Isaiah 49. It is too light a thing that my servant should raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel. I will make you my servant as a light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth. Full and complete restoration for the tribes of Jacob, for Israel.

That is too small a thing for my servant to do. Too light a thing. Let's make this salvation about the world, the whole world. Let's bring the Gentiles in as well.

Let's bring the nations in. That would be more worthy of me, says the Lord. He gives more than we ask. The story is told of an impoverished philosopher who fell on hard times and he was serving in the courts of Alexander the Great.

[13:50] He was in dire poverty. So he thought, well, who better to go to than the great man himself, the great emperor, my master and the conqueror of the known worlds. So he requested a hearing and he asked Alexander for help.

And the king responded by giving him a commission to receive from his treasurer whatever he asked. So the philosopher quickly found the treasurer and requested a huge sum of money in Alexander's name.

Hundred thousand pounds. Hundred thousand pounds. The treasurer was aghast at the request. He refused to give such a high amount from the treasury.

He went back to Alexander with the matter and he said that the request is unreasonable, isn't it? It's absurd. Alexander heard the treasurer's point and replied, let the money be paid instantly.

I'm delighted with the philosopher's way of thinking. He has done me honor by the largeness of the request. He shows the high idea that he has conceived both of my superior riches and my royal kindness.

[15:07] I am Alexander the Great. But so often, don't we think a bit like the treasurer? You can't expect that much from Alexander.

Can't expect that much from God, from who he is. But we do him honor when we expect more, don't we? And when we seek more from him as a God.

The largeness of our requests shows that we conceive of his superior riches and kindness compared with anything or anyone else. We often think that he's insubstantial.

We don't expect much. So we don't ask much. But he gives us more than we ask. More than we ask or imagine. But thirdly and lastly, he gives you more than you deserve.

He gives you more than you deserve. When you look at the kind of character King Jehoram is, there is a sense that this really should not be happening to him, should it? He is given this super

abundance.

[16:16] Filled with water. And he really, really is not worthy of it. Just look at him. He has not treated God well.

Not at all. Hear what Elisha says to him in verse 13. What have I to do with you? Go to the prophets of your father or of your mother.

He's saying, isn't he? Look, Jehoram, you've not got a good track record with God. Your habit has been to go to your little idols. And you've only come to God in a crisis, haven't you, Jehoram? You've treated God like a kind of butler to deal with problems when they've come along. Jehoram wants God to help him to escape on the way of from the way of trouble.

But he's not come to God before to lead him on the way of discipleship, has he, in everyday life. For Jehoram, God is like a God who is in a box with glass on the front and it says break glass in case of emergency.

[17:24] Or he's like an emergency airbag. It's good that you've got him there, but you really don't want to have to use it. He isn't worthy. Because he has still clung on to these false gods, the gods of his great, great, great grandfather, Jeroboam.

The sense of his introduction in verses one to three is that he's not as wicked as he could be. But he really isn't as righteous as he should be.

He's turned away, but he hasn't turned away from idols. And the sense of disappointment we feel in him, we're meant to feel that.

We're meant to feel, in a sense, God's disappointment. Because God demands from him and from us total obedience and trust.

So he doesn't deserve anything, does he? He's a double-minded, hypocritical, hopeless man with a very, very low opinion of God.

[18:34] And similarly, in our sins, we've said to God, haven't we as well, I don't think you are kind. I don't think you're substantial or big enough to meet my needs.

And like him, we've clung to other gods. We're thirsty, but we pant for other things to quench our thirst.

It's interesting, isn't it, as the lockdown is eased, what things people are rushing back to that they think will quench their thirst for life.

What are we desperate to have back? Our pubs, our economy, our shops, our social life, our finances, our stuff, our image, our hairdressers, whatever.

You could probably fill in the rest, couldn't you? And we're after those things because we are thirsty for life. But we refuse God.

[19:37] We refuse to go to him. We want to change that psalm that we really love, don't we? Psalm 42. As a deer pants for flowing stream, so my soul pants for you, oh technology.

My soul pants for you, oh my money. We can fill in the rest. So like with Jehoram, why should he give us anything?

Why should God give us anything? Perhaps Jehoram knew that he hadn't been true to God. So he assumed, well, I don't deserve anything, so I won't expect anything.

I don't deserve it, so I won't ask for it. So it's a double-sided coin, isn't it? We distance ourselves from God, either because we think sinning is better when it isn't, or we keep our distance from God because we're ashamed that we've made that bad decision, and we sense that, and we sense we don't deserve his goodness.

But he gives us more than we expect, more than we ask for, and more than we deserve. He blesses us with a superabundance.

[20:55] Now why? Why is that? Look with me at verse 14. Elisha said, As the Lord of hosts live before whom I stand, were it not that I have regard for Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, I would neither look at you nor see you.

That's what he says to Jehoram. Elisha's quite blunt, isn't he, there? You do not deserve this, Jehoram, but God is going to give it to you because I have regard for Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, who stands with you in this battle.

Do you see, Jehoram is so undeserving. He is crooked. He's unfaithful to God. But he's blessed because of somebody else, Jehoshaphat.

King Jehoshaphat was the king of Judah at the time, and he was a king from David's line. Jehoram gets more than he expects, asks for or deserves, because another king brings the favor of God

upon him.

A king of David stands on the battlefield with him. And look at how grace is given in verse 20.

[22 : 16] It is given the water comes about the time of the morning sacrifice. And in a weird turn of events, the victory is won when the Moabites mistake that water for blood, don't they?

They think Jehoram and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom have turned on each other. So they rush in to get the spoils, but they realize it's only water, but it's too late.

Now, when you pull all of that together, you can't help but hear the kind of overtones, that quenching, that true satisfaction for Israel, that filling is given at the time of the sacrifice because of a king of Judah from David's line.

And blood is seen as the enemy is destroyed, and it is what destroys the enemy. There is, of course, a king from David's line, a better Jehoshaphat, King Jesus, the king of Judah, the king who is God himself in the flesh.

God himself who stands with his people on the battlefield and gives them the blessings of God. God stands with them to give them the blessings of God in Jesus Christ.

[23 : 46] God stands with us so that God can give us what we don't deserve. And he does that at the time of sacrifice. He opens the way to himself and he removes the enemy forever.

His blood is shed unseen and the enemy is doomed. When you look at the cross like we were this morning in Matthew's gospel, you can see there that our God, the God of Israel, is the God who gives more, more than we expect, more than we ask for, and way more than we deserve.

He gives a super abundance of grace. We don't deserve a thimble full from him, do we? But we get an ocean full. I always remember the line in the prayer of humble access, which comes from the Church of England liturgy.

It's some of the best liturgy ever written. And it says, we do not presume to come to this, your table, merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your manifold, in your many and great mercies, we are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table, but you are the same Lord whose nature is always to have mercy.

If we were having the Lord's Supper tonight, maybe I would have read those before the supper. We are not worthy, are we? But in Jesus Christ, God says you must, because of him, allow yourself and you must have this idea, both of my superior riches and my royal kindness towards you in Jesus.

[25 : 41] And because of King Jesus standing with us, saying I am not worthy or saying I don't deserve this is no longer an excuse.

It's no longer an excuse for expecting little from me, says God. It's no excuse to wallow in shame and assume that all I want to do is make your life worse and that I don't love you and I want to bless you.

Saying you don't deserve that, although it's true, it's no longer an excuse because Jesus Christ stands with you. God stands with you to give you the blessings of God.

God stands with you to give you the blessings of God. So when we feel shame standing before God with our sins, we have to remember that we're also standing next to God in Jesus Christ.

And this then is the God who can wean us off of our false idols, isn't it? And our sins. As well as commanding us not to sin, which he does, of course.

[26 : 56] As well as commanding us not to go to the inferior pleasures of momentary sin. He also gives us the superior joys of his riches and kindness towards us in Jesus Christ.

So take this message with you this evening. If you're thirsty this evening for life, go to Jesus. Jesus says in John's gospel, everyone who drinks other water will be thirsty again.

But whoever drinks the water that I give will never thirst. Indeed, the water that I give will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

And I think deep down we do agree with Psalm 42, don't we?

So my soul pants for you. Oh, God. My soul thirsts for you. The living God.

[28 : 08] Because he is more than we expect. More than we've asked for. And he is definitely more than we deserve. Let's pray.

Amen. Amen.