

# (2 Kings) How to Prepare for Blessing

by David Guzik

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*God wants us to prepare for the blessing that He intends to bring, and He gives us things that we can do to prepare for it.*

**Duration:** 59:53

**Scripture:** 2 Kings 4:2-44, Matthew 6:33

**Topics:** "Faith And Work", "Gods Provision"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of unimpressive or unspectacular work in the context of leadership. They use the example of digging ditches to illustrate how God purposely uses and relies on our work. The speaker emphasizes that God's intention is not just to provide for our needs, but to draw us closer to Him. They also highlight several miracles performed by Elisha, demonstrating God's provision and power. The sermon encourages listeners to diligently work and trust in God's gracious provision.

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## Transcript

All right, tonight we're going to begin in 2 Kings chapter 3 and I plan on doing chapter 4 as well, but we'll see how it comes. This is a very interesting chapter, chapter 3 of 2 Kings. Just from an archaeological perspective, most of the events of chapter 3 are recorded in Moabite archaeological records that have been uncovered by archaeologists.

Something called the Moabite stone, or sometimes it's called the Mesha Stele. It was discovered in 1868 and it confirms many of the events of this chapter. Of course, as you might expect, it gives the events a distinctly pro-Moabite spin, as it explains them, but it is a wonderful confirmation of the historical validity of these events and the biblical record.

Anyway, let's just jump right into it here. Verse 1 of 2 Kings chapter 3. Now Jehoram, the son of Ahab, became king over Israel at Samaria in the 18th year of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and reigned 12 years. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, but not like his father and his mother, for he put away the sacred pillar of Baal that his father had made.

Nevertheless, he persisted in the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin. He did not depart from them. Well, we think of this man, Jehoram, the son of Ahab and Jezebel.

You have to say this man came from a family that was far, far past dysfunctional. This man came from a family that was extremely troubled. His father Ahab was one of the worst kings the northern kingdom of Israel ever knew, and his mother Jezebel was certainly the worst queen that the northern kingdom ever knew.

But yet Jehoram, for some reason, was not as bad as his father and his mother. Even though he was not as bad as them, he was still a wicked man. He was the ninth consecutive bad king over the northern kingdom, which never had a godly king.

Since this time of separation in the days of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, when they split the northern kingdom from the southern kingdom, when they had the ten northern tribes and the two southern tribes, they never had a godly king over Israel. And so he persisted in these sins, the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. If we remember him, he was the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel.

And what he did was not so much the worship of a false god, but what he practiced was the false worship of the true God. And we see here that Jehoram continued in the same sins. It's very interesting, though, that he does say that he put away the sacred pillar of Baal that his father had made.

We might expect him to be complimented for it. But the scriptures don't seem to compliment him. And later on, we're going to see that this man Jehoram meets one of the prophets of God, Elisha.

And when he meets Elisha, Elisha is not impressed with Jehoram at all. Not one bit. He doesn't even compliment him for putting away the sacred pillar of Baal.

It may very well be that even though Jehoram did clean up things a little bit in regard to the worship of Baal, that even that what he did, he did it with bad motives. So in these days, look what happens here, verses 4 and 5. Now Misha, the king of Moab, was a sheep breeder, and he regularly paid the king of Israel 100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams. But it happened when Ahab died that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel.

The Moabites lived on the eastern side of the Dead Sea, across the River Jordan, in what we would call today modern-day Jordan. They were under tribute to Israel. In other words, they kept their own king.

They kept their own kingdom. But because Israel had dominion over them, they caused them to pay tribute to them. And you see the amount of the tribute here.

What was it? 100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams. But when King Ahab died, the king of the Moabites saw this as an opportunity to escape this taxation that was forced upon him by the king of Israel. So what does he do? Verses 6, 7, and 8 here.

So King Jehoram went out of Samaria at that time and mustered all Israel. Then he went and sent to Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, saying, The king of Moab has rebelled against me. Will you go up with me to fight against Moab? And he said, I will go up.

I am as you are. My people as your people. My horses as your horses.

Then he said, which way shall we go up? And he answered, by the way of the wilderness of Edom. So Jehoram, the king of Israel, being wise, says, well, if I'm going to fight against the Moabites, I may as well get as many allies as I can. So let's get the king of Judah to help me.

And the king of Judah, I would say unwisely, decides to go into the alliance with the king of Israel and go and attack Moab together. You see the fellowship that they had there, so to speak. He says, listen, my horses are as your horses.

My people are as your people. And he says, let's go. Let's go together and fight against the Moabites.

By the way, Jehoram of Israel, you see here, he asked Jehoshaphat of Judah for military advice because Jehoshaphat was far more experienced in battle than Jehoram was. And so the king of Judah suggested that they attack Moab from the south, going through the very dry desert of Edom along the way. Now, they could have attacked very easily from the west, just going right across the Jordan River.

But he said, no, no, that's what they would be expecting. Let's bring a surprise attack and swing around through the south. They'll never be expecting that.

So now verse 9, So the king of Israel went with the king of Judah and the king of Edom, and they marched on that roundabout route seven days. And there was no water for the army, nor for the animals that followed them. And the king of Israel said, alas, for the Lord has called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab.

And so the combined armies of Israel, Judah and Edom, as they went through the Edomite land, they picked up the army of Edom as well. They had to travel a considerable distance to bring the surprise attack on the Moabites from the south. And as they were in the midst of that very dry desert of Edom, they found themselves without water, without a road map, I suppose, without any real direction, and they couldn't do anything.

And did you notice what Jehoram's reaction was? It's really wonderful. It's very telling, isn't it? He says, alas, for the Lord has called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of the king of Moab. Now, you don't see the king of the Edomites saying that.

You don't hear the more godly man Jehoshaphat saying that. You hear Jehoram saying it. Why? Because he has a guilty conscience.

Because of his guilty conscience, he believes that every calamity is the judgment of God upon him. His own sin made him think that everything that happened in his life, or at least every negative thing, was the judgment of God. And so what happens here? Verse 11, so Jehoshaphat said, is there no prophet of the Lord here that we may inquire of the Lord by him? So one of the servants of the king of Israel answered and said, Elisha, the son of Shaphat is here, who poured water on the hands of Elisha.

And Jehoshaphat said, the word of the Lord is with him. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat, the king of Edom, went down to him. So I want you to notice here.

Do you get the situation? One of the servants of the king of Israel calls attention to the fact that Elisha is there. Now, let's remind ourselves, where did Elisha and Elisha have their ministry? Was it in the southern kingdom of Judah? Or was it in the northern kingdom of Israel? It was almost all in the northern kingdom of Israel. And so when they spoke out boldly and prophetically against the corruption of the ruling kings and the idolatry of the kingdom, they were speaking to the kings of Israel, not to the kings of Judah primarily.

And so they had a suggestion from the servant. The servant says, is there no prophet of the Lord here? Excuse me, Jehoshaphat asks that. Jehoshaphat, the more godly king of Judah.

And they want to get some help. By the way, I want you to notice the difference here. Both Jehoram and Jehoshaphat believed that there was a spiritual or a divine element to their current crisis.

Both of them thought God is involved in this somehow. Jehoram thought God is involved in this. He's judging me.

Jehoshaphat thought God is involved in this. Maybe he wants to help us. Maybe he wants to bring help to us through a prophet.

Therefore, Jehoram believed that God was to be avoided because of the crisis. But Jehoshaphat felt that God should be sought because of the crisis. And so they say, hey, look, there's this guy, Elisha, around here.

And he used to pour waters on the hands of Elijah. By the way, isn't that a wonderful description of the prophet there? That's him. You know, that's the guy who served his senior prophet.

That's the guy who served his mentor. Oh, yeah, the guy who poured water on the hands of Elijah. It's a wonderful title for any servant of God.

Elisha was the humble and practical servant of Elijah. That was spiritual service. Let me remind you what I'm saying here.

The pouring of water on the hands, that was spiritual service. That prepared Elisha for further spiritual service. And so what did they do? They go down and see.

I got to say, I got to say, this is remarkable humility on the part of these three kings. If you notice that they're in verse 12, it says, So the king of Israel, Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him. Is that the way kings normally act? No, what do kings do? They bring people to them.

They sit right where they are on their own big rear ends. And they say, you come to me. But they very humbly went out and sought Elisha.

This is a good start to this. We're encouraged by seeing these kings humble themselves in front of the prophet. So what happens here? Verse 13.

Then Elisha said to the king of Israel, What have I to do with you? Go to the prophets of your father and the prophets of your mother. But the king of Israel said, No, for the Lord has called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab. Guilty conscience at work again, right? And Elisha said, As the Lord of hosts lives before whom I stand, surely were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, I would not look at you nor see you, but now bring me a musician.

Then it happened that when the musician played, the hand of the Lord came upon him. So here the three kings come, and they're looking for some kind of answer, some kind of hope from Elisha. And as they knock on his door, he opens up the door.

And what does he say? He sees the three kings. I see crowns, you know, right there. And they're all... I think of the three kings.

We three... Never mind. You know, just think of that whole situation there. And then Elisha says, What are you doing here? Get out of here.

You don't have any place here. I don't want to see you. It's a Hebrew way of speaking to just say, I don't... What have I to do with you? Get away from me, is what he was saying.

But yet he looked again and he saw the presence of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah. It wasn't that Elisha was against every great or powerful person. He was willing to speak to these three kings for the sake of Jehoshaphat, who was the godly king of Judah.

And so he said, OK, I'll speak to you. I'll see if God has anything to say to you. Now, notice he couldn't just speak off the top of his head.

They weren't there to seek just the wisdom of the prophet or his good advice or his life experience. They wanted to hear what the Lord might say to the prophet. And what did he have to say? Well, he had to say it when the musician came upon him and spoke.

Isn't that interesting? When Elisha wanted to become more sensitive to the leading and the speaking of the Holy Spirit, he asked for the service of the musician. That demonstrates that there is significant spiritual power in music. Now, there's a nameless musician here.

Look in the text again. Does it tell you anywhere the name of this musician? You don't know him. But that nameless musician was endowed with God-given talents and he used them for the glory of God and the good of other people.

I don't think it ever occurred to that musician, as he's leading worship, as he's drawing music, as he's drawing Elisha into the presence of the Lord through his ministry of music, I don't think it's occurring to him that he's helping to save three armies and to win a battle. But that's exactly what he was doing. You know, it's an awesome thing.

It's an awesome power to lead people before the throne of God in worship. And it's something that those who have the ministry of music should never take lightly, never take it casually, never fall in love with their ability to connect with people and to, you know, lead them and to get them to respond. Instead, they should see it as such a sacred duty before the Lord.

They should keep in their mind this picture of Elisha saying, I want to hear from the Lord. I want to get close to him. Bring me a musician.

And so now in verse 16, you have the word from God that came through the prophet. He says, and he said, thus says the Lord, make this valley full of ditches. I can just imagine as soon as he says that, the three kings look at each other and they go, do you have another musician that you can bring here? What are you talking about? Make this valley full of ditches.

But anyway, go on here. Verse 17, for thus says the Lord, you shall not see wind, nor shall you see rain. Yet that valley shall be filled with water so that you, your cattle and your animals may drink.

And this is a simple matter in the sight of the Lord. He will also deliver the Moabites into your hand. Also, you shall attack every fortified city and every choice city and cut down every good tree and stop up every spring of water and ruin every good place, good piece of land with stones.

That's a strange, strange promise from God. He said, you're not going to see wind. You're not going to see rain.

Yet that valley is going to be filled with water. And I can just imagine the king said, well, where's the water going to come from? No rain, no wind, no nothing. Yet water is going to come to the valley.

And then they have them go, go make this valley full of ditches. I want you to get the connection here. God promised to send the water to the valley.

That is something that the kings or the soldiers in their army could not do. But what they could do was they could make the valley full of ditches. They had to dig the ditches to catch whatever God would provide.

They had to dig the ditches before the water came so that they could benefit from it when it came. You see, the dried up riverbed that the armies were on was to have a lot of trenches, a lot of holes in it. They were going to dig foxholes or swimming pools or whatever they were going to drink, dig.

But that valley was going to have water come through it and the ditches would hold the water when it came through. I want you to just picture in your mind what it was like when those three kings returned from their visit to Elisa and told the commanders to have the men dig ditches. Here you have an army dying of thirst in the hot desert sun.

Say, guys, we've just heard from the prophet. Get out your shovels and start digging holes in the hard ground of the desert floor. I'll tell you what, it's a compliment to these armies that there was not a mutiny.

These thirsty, near-dead men in the middle of the desert didn't look forward to the hard work of digging the ditches in the dry ground, yet that work was essential. I think you have a very, very important principle here for your life and might I say in particular for ministry. It's that God wants us to prepare for the blessing that He intends to bring.

If you listen to Him, if you're able to anticipate His working, then get ready for it. You see, they couldn't send the water, but they could dig the ditches. And digging ditches was something that the people of God really could do.

God didn't ask them to do more than what they could do. When God asks us to prepare for blessing that He intends to bring, He doesn't give you things that you can't do. He tells you something that you really can do.

Listen, if you expect the Holy Spirit to bless something, then you should prepare for that expectation. You should make the valley full of trenches or ditches. Make ready for the Holy Ghost power.

I remember seeing a cartoon many years ago, and there's two Eskimos ice fishing. And one's fishing in the ice, you know, and there he is. He's got his, you know, fishing rod and the line down and thing.

And there's a hole, you know, dug in the ice. And there's another Eskimo there, and he's fishing in another hole. Except his hole, you could fit a motor home through that hole.

You know, bring it up through the water. And it's just a very simple cartoon saying, this one is expecting to catch a really big fish, and that's why he cut a big hole. You know, oftentimes, oftentimes God says, according to your faith, that's how I'm going to reward you.

You know, you cut a small hole, I'll bring you a small fish. You dig a little ditch, well, then you're just going to capture a little bit of water. But dig the valley full of ditches.

You see, I want you to notice this. We say, well, when God sends the blessing, then I'll do it. Maybe that's the way of unbelief for you in this case.

You see, the way of faith is to say, God has promised it and we will get ready for it. God is ready to bless, and we're going to be prepared to receive the blessing that he brings. And by the way, he wanted to remind them, if you noticed it in verse 19, he said, this is a simple matter in the sight of the Lord.

The kings came to Elijah inquiring about water. What were they interested in? Survival. Oh, God, help us survive somehow.

Don't let our armies perish in the desert. If we can just make it home. Forget about the Moabites.

God says, forget about survival. I want you guys to have victory. It seems all too often today, you run across Christians who really their main interest is in surviving their Christian life.

Oh, just help me make it to the end here. Just let me survive my crisis. Listen, if your eyes are set on survival, it's far too small of a goal.

God wants to give you triumphant victory. Wants to make you more than a conqueror. He said, listen, the same God that can provide water for you in the desert, he'll provide you victory over the Moabites.

So look at it here now, verse 20. Now, it happened in the morning when the grain offering was offered that suddenly water came by way of Edom and the land was filled with water. It says that water came by the way of Edom.

Now, we're not told exactly, but it really seems like the best reconstruction of this is that God sent an intense downpour of rain in the nearby mountains far enough away so that they didn't have the wind or the rain or the clouds. It was far enough away in the mountains, but the mountains were flooded with rain and it caused what we would call a flash flood. Through the desert of Edom.

And these flash floods have been noted in that part of the world and other parts of the world since then. Rain happens in a high up place from where the torrential downpour and there's so much water and it has no place to go. It's all runoff and it just comes screaming down the mountains into these valleys and these dry riverbeds.

Then you have an intense flash flood that sweeps through the valley and the result of it was right there in verse 20. The land was filled with water. I want you to notice something.

The water was available only because they were obedient to dig the ditches. It was the ditches that they dug that collected the water from the flash flood. If Israel and Judah would have disobeyed God's word and failed to dig the ditches, then the blessing would have passed them by.

The blessing would have come through just the same, but it would have passed them by. They wouldn't have been benefiting from it. God told them to get ready to prepare and to receive to catch this blessing.

I want you to notice something. What God told them to do to prepare for the blessing didn't make much sense to them, did it? I don't think they figured out. I mean, oh yeah, flash flood's going to come through.

That's exactly how God's going to do it. No, I don't think they had a clue. All I think they knew is that this is what God told them to do.

They just had to obey. I also want you to notice that the measure of water available to the thirsty men was directly connected to how faithful they were to dig the ditches. The more ditches they dug and the bigger that the ditches were, the more water that they had.

What did they want? Did they want enough water to drink? One little glass of water? Or did they want a swimming pool to swim in? It just matter how obedient they were going to be. Though it was hard, it was unpleasant work, the more they did, the more blessings they received. Something else I want you to see, too.

The ditches were not the blessing. And the ditches were not the victory, though they were essential parts of what God was going to do with the blessing and the victory. When God wants us to do something to prepare for blessing, we shouldn't confuse the preparation for the blessing with the blessing itself.

Without the miraculous blessing of God, those ditches meant nothing. Nothing. Great, you got a bunch of ditches.

What good is that? It's nothing without the blessing of God. And so it's just absolutely wonderful. You can just see I've pictured in my mind the soldiers laughing and splashing and almost swimming in ditches that they've done.

They're so happy God has saved them. But that's not the end of it. Look at it here in verse 21.

And when all the Moabites heard that the kings had come up to fight against them, all who were able to bear arms and older were gathered and they stood at the border. Then they rose up early in the morning and the sun was shining on the water. And the Moabites saw the water on the other side as red as blood.

And they said, this is blood. The kings have surely struck swords and they've killed one another. And now, therefore, Moab to the spoil.

So when they came to the camp of Israel, Israel rose up and attacked the Moabites so that they fled before them and they entered their land, killing the Moabites. Then they destroyed the cities. And each man threw a stone on every good piece of land and filled it.

And they stopped up all the springs of water and cut down all the good trees. But they left some of the stones at Kir Haraseth intact. However, the slingers surrounded and attacked it.

Now, this shows you how God blesses it when we prepare for blessing in obedience. You might think that it was enough that it just provided survival for the thirsty army. But God instead, by his own plan, by his own working said, these very ditches that you dug are going to be the instruments of victory against the Moabites.

You see, those ditches caused confusion among the Moabites. They looked upon them and God probably was doing some funny mind trick upon them. You know, see red, see red, see red, see blood, see blood.

I don't know what God was doing. But whatever it was, they looked upon them and they thought they were convinced that these kings were killing each other. And they rushed down into the battle and they found themselves slaughtered by the three kings.

You see, God used those ditches in a completely unexpected way to supply the need and to defeat the enemy. And I think it's absolutely amazing, this whole situation. You know what I like about this? I think

that in many ways it shows us what it's like to be a godly leader.

This whole principle of digging ditches. Now I want you to think about this. Like digging ditches here in 2 Kings chapter 3, leadership is hard work.

You're going to go out and dig a ditch? It's not easy. It's hard work. If you're expecting leadership in the body of Christ to be easy, you're thinking the wrong way.

Secondly, I'd say that like digging ditches in this chapter, leadership is done with faith in what God is going to do in the future. You know, it's like, woo, I'm so happy I get to dig a ditch. It's not like digging the ditch is the end in itself.

You're doing it trusting that God is going to do something in the future. Like digging ditches, leadership is blessed beyond all reasonable expectation. I mean, that's how God wants to bless leadership.

Beyond what anybody would expect. And I think they would have been happy if the ditches would have just provided water. But it did far more than that.

Like digging ditches, leadership has to use delegation. Do you think those kings dug the ditches themselves? Not on your life. They delegated the work to other people.

They were in charge of making sure it was done. But leadership will use delegation. Like digging ditches, leadership doesn't matter anything without a miracle.

That's what they needed. Like digging ditches, the work of leadership often feels like work without a reward. I can imagine those soldiers felt like that.

Digging, digging, digging. Okay, where's the water? All right, it's not here. Digging, digging, digging.

It felt at the time like work without a reward. And oftentimes that's how the work of Christian leadership is. It feels unrewarded, at least for a season.

And like digging ditches, the work of leadership will be criticized or doubted. Do you think that this work got done without any criticism? Do you think there wasn't some officers or some generals in the army saying to the king, you can't make my men do that. But the kings insisted and it was done.

Like digging ditches, leadership means not accepting the present state of dryness. You can't just say, well, we're dying of thirst in the desert. And if that's what God wills, then that's what God wills.

No, you just say, no. No, we're dry. We're dead.

This congregation, you might say, this home Bible study, whatever you have. These are like dead, dry bones. And I'm not going to have it.

God, we're going to get on our faces and seek you until you bring life. Until you bring water. And don't be surprised that when you get serious about doing that, God tells you to dig some ditches.

I don't know how. I don't know where. I don't know with what.

But don't be surprised if he says, OK, this is how I want you to do it. This is how I want you to prepare for the blessing. Like digging ditches, the work of leadership often seems unimpressive or unspectacular.

You know, can you imagine? Here's a soldier digging the ditch, you know, isn't this great? I'm winning a battle right here. He doesn't feel like that, does he? It feels ridiculous. I'm digging a hole.

I'm providing water for a whole army. Woo. He doesn't feel like that.

Listen, if you're expecting Christian leadership to be this thing, well, every day is an exciting and beautiful challenge. You know, wow, isn't it great? It's a new star shining every morning. Listen, a lot of times it just feels like unimpressive or unspectacular work.

But like digging ditches, the work of leadership is purposely used and relied on by God. Let me explain to you what I mean by that. Did God need those ditches to provide water for the army? No.

He could have airlifted pallets full of Evian water or something like that. I don't know. He could have done anything.

God could have provided water in a hundred different ways for that army, but he deliberately chose a way that would make them prepare for blessing that would come in the future. That's how God works. Why does he work that? Because for God, it isn't just about providing the need.

It's about drawing you closer to him. It's about working in your life in that way. And so this is an important chapter here, I think, for us.

It shows us a lot about how God wants to work in our life and through our leadership. Anyway, now on to verse 26. And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too fierce for him, he took with him 700 men who drew swords to break through to the king of Edom.

But they could not. Then he took his eldest son who would have reigned in his place and offered him as a burnt offering upon the wall. And there was great indignation against Israel.

So they departed from him and returned to their own land. That shows how desperate the king of Moab was following his defeat on the field of battle. He did this to honor his pagan gods and to show his own people how determined he was to prevent defeat.

And the radical determination of the king of Moab convinced the kings of Israel, Judah and Edom that they could not completely defeat Moab. They felt content with their near complete victory. And so Moab was once again put under tribute and they went back home, but it wasn't totally conquered.

Now on to chapter four here. Verse one, a certain woman of the wives of the sons of prophets cried out to Elisha saying, Your servant, my husband, is dead. And you know that your servant feared the Lord.

And the creditor is coming to take my two sons to be his slaves. So Elisha said to her, What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house? And she said, Your maid servant has nothing in the house but a jar of oil. Then he said, Go borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors, empty vessels.

Do not gather just a few. And when you've come in, you shall shut the door behind you and your sons, then pour it into all those vessels and set aside the full ones. So she went from him and shut the door behind her and her sons and brought the vessels to her and they poured it out.

Now it came to pass when the vessels were full that she said to her son, Bring me another vessel. And he said, There is not another vessel. So the oil ceased.

So then she came and told the man of God and he said, Go sell the oil and pay your debt. And you and your sons live on the rest. Beautiful situation here, isn't it? The woman was a widow of one of the sons of the prophets.

She had debts and she had no way to pay the debts. And the legal system in Israel would not allow her to declare bankruptcy. So what could she do? The only thing that she could do is sell one of her sons into slavery so that he could work off the debt that they owed to the creditors.

And so she comes and she appeals to Elisha for help. She says, Hey, your maidservant has nothing in the house but a jar of oil. Now, there is some evidence from the ancient Hebrew that this jar of oil was not a larger supply of oil that was used for cooking, but it was a smaller vessel that held oil for anointing.

So we're probably not talking about a big bottle or jar. We're probably talking about a small bottle. Think maybe in your mind, maybe about the size of a perfume bottle.

It's a unique word here, probably the word used for a small anointing flask. So great. What do you have? I have this small bottle of oil.

What are you going to do with it? All right. He says, fine, go knock on the doors of your neighbor's house and collect all the empty vessels you can. I think this is wonderful.

You imagine the position he put this woman into. Small village. Everybody talks with one another, right? Knocks on the door.

Hi, do you have any empty bottles or empty things in your house that I can have? Well, yeah, you can have them. But why? Well, and she has to explain the whole story. Man, that takes faith, doesn't it? Doesn't it take guts to go out and do that? To say, well, you know, Elisha the prophet is going to provide miraculously for all of my needs.

And he told me just to collect as many things like this. And I don't know what they're going to do with it. But it has something to do with oil and a lot of oil.

And so I don't know what they're going to do. You see, her way of asking invited all of these awkward questions. But she went out and she did it in faith.

Listen, God takes care of his servants. But he almost always does it in ways that stretches their faith. Can I just say again, let's draw a likeness between the last story we just saw about the provision of water in the wilderness and this.

God could have had, you know, a chariot pulled up to this woman. You just won the Philistine lottery or something like that. I don't know what they had in that day.

Yeah, oh, here's all this money. Here's this great old beautiful for you. Good for you.

Yes, yes, yes. Great. Is that how it worked? No, not at all.

God could have provided for this woman's need in any number of ways. But he deliberately did it in a way that would stretch her faith. And look, honestly, you and I, how do we feel about it when God's stretching our faith? Oh, no, God, please.

No, what are you doing? No, stop, stop, stop. It's wonderful. I love reading about these things in the Bible.

It's so great. You know, nice, detached. I love telling you about it.

I love it. Well, yes, you know, you have to take that step of faith. Yes, you just have to really trust the Lord.

Man, I would rather read about it. I would rather teach about it than have to do it myself any day of the week. That's not how God works, is it? He deliberately puts us in these places where we're stretched.

And so there's a knocking on all these doors. And then what does she do? She goes back to take that one jar of oil. That's all you have.

That's all you have, that one little jar of oil. And you put all of those vessels that you have that you have gathered at the price of your pride throughout the whole village. And by the way, how many vessels are on the table in front of her? How many? However many she had the guts to go out and collect, right? However many she had the faith and would endure the humiliation to go out and get.

You know, she walks by this or. Oh, no, I can't ask them. I can't ask Mrs. Jones.

No, forget Mrs. Jones. Let's go on. Here's Mrs. Smith.

OK, Mrs. Smith, she's pretty nice. Oh, but they're not. No, you know, she's just like, what? How many vessels does she have on the table in front of her? It's all dependent on how obedient she was, on how much faith that she answered with.

And so there she stands in front of it. And what does she have to do? She has to take that one little vial, that one little perfume size bottle of oil, open it up. And she has to pour it into one of the vessels.

Now, listen, we're not told all the details in this thing, but I know how it worked. I've got it all pictured out in my head. You know, she opens up the bottle and she tips it over.

And with the first one, I mean, she's almost closing her eyes and she pours it really, really, really slow. And she goes and she goes. Now, I know how some people think they would think that somehow that bottle miraculously became like a faucet that just turned on.

It's just pouring out. Oh, it's a gusher. And she said, you know, no, I don't think so.

In my mind, as I picture this, she pours it and then it stops. She shakes it and there's a few more drops. Then she looks up and said, no, it's all gone.

And she looked and she was pouring it into a big jar. There's just a little bit of oil back there. So what does she do? Oh, it's all done.

She takes the jars and a little perfume size bottle. She puts it back on the table and she takes a deep breath. And for some reason, she picks it up again.

Well, it's heavy again. What's up with that? And she pours. It's full again.

And so what does she have to do? Empty fill, empty fill, empty fill until every single vessel on the table in front of her is absolutely filled. At the end of it, she had a lot of oil. I want you to notice something here.

Elijah made her do it. I don't know. If I was Elisha and I knew God was going to do some kind of miracle like that, I'd want to do it, wouldn't you? I'd walk in.

Get away. Let me have that bottle. Whoo.

You know, this is great. You know, no, no, no. Elisha made her do it.

Do you know why? Because he knew that she had to trust God for herself. She had to learn it herself. And that original vessel of oil, the one that she had in her house, that small little one, that one was the means for distributing the oil into all those other vessels.

But it required constant pouring out and allowing it to be filled again. And by the way, might I say this, too. Every vessel on the table in front of her, it had to be empty before it could be filled.

What good would it be to put full vessels on the table in front of the woman? It's filled with water. What are you going to do? Pour a little bit of oil into it? No. So it had to be empty before it could be filled.

And she pours and she pours. You could see she's joyful. And then pretty soon it's just like it doesn't even need faith at all.

Whoo. You know, just put it down. And then it's just great, wonderful event.

And then finally, when she filled every vessel on the table in front of her, filled to the brim, then the oil ceased. And she put that bottle down for the last time. You know what she thought? She said, I should have asked Mrs. Jones.

Right. How come I didn't ask Mrs. Jones? She had some empty vessels, too. I mean, she rejoiced for the faith that she did have, but she can't help but think, oh, if I would have had even more faith, I could have seen even more done.

But she did borrow enough so that the excess oil was sold and it provided money to pay the debt to the creditor and provide for the future. If she would have borrowed more, more would have been provided. But she borrowed enough, it seems.

By the way, I would say that the oil did not pour out on the ground or simply flow about it. The oil was intended for prepared vessels. I want you to think, what did each vessel need to have happen to it for it to be used in this situation? First of all, it had to be gathered, right? Secondly, it had to be assembled by being put on the table.

Third, it had to be emptied. Fourth, it had to be put in the right position, right? It does no good if the vessel's here, if the pouring is going on here. It has to be in the right position and then it has to stay in the right position.

When all of those prepared vessels were filled, that's what God wants to fill up, is a prepared vessel. I think we're just struck by this, how the principle of this miracle is the same as the principle of the ditches dug in the previous chapter. The amount of man's work with the miracle determined the amount of blessing and provision actually received.

And don't you see, this is a wonderful, wonderful thing. Here you have one of these awesome combinations of the amazing sovereign power of God and the hard work of man. Don't we sometimes

think that God's powerful provision means we don't have to work so hard? Let me tell you, God's powerful provision, it invites our hard work.

It never excuses laziness. Your God is a mighty providing God, so you better go out and get to work. You better go out and dig the ditches.

You better go out and collect the vessels because you work for a very gracious providing God. Well, let's go on to verse 8. This chapter actually seems to be just a collection of marvelous stories of miracles wrought through the hand of Elisha. So here's another miracle here, starting at verse 8. Now, it happened one day that Elisha went to Shunam and there was a notable woman.

She persuaded him to eat some food. So it was, as often as he passed by, that he would turn in there to eat some food. And she said to her husband, look now, I know this is a holy man of God who passes by us regularly.

Please let us make a small upper room on the wall and let's put a bed for him there and a table and a chair and a lamp stand. So it'll be that whenever he comes to us, he can turn in there. So it happened one day that when he came there, he turned into the upper room and lay down there.

Then he said to Gehazi, his servant, call the Shunamite woman. When he had called her, she stood before him and she said to him, say now to her, look, you've been concerned with us for all this care. What can I do for you? Do you want me to speak on your behalf to the king or the commander of the army? She answered, I dwell among my own people.

So he said, what then is there to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, actually, she has no son and her husband is old. So he said, call her. When he had called her, she stood in the doorway.

Then he said, about the same time next year, you shall embrace a son. And she said, no, my lord, man of God, do not lie to your maid servant. But the woman conceived and bore a son when the appointed time had come, of which Elisha had told her.

It's a remarkable relationship between the prophet Elisha and the Shunamite woman. And it began when the woman sought to do something for the prophet. I want you to notice, Elisha didn't seek anything from the woman.

As a matter of fact, she eventually persuaded him to eat some food as the guest of her hospitality. But he wasn't out fishing for something from the woman. And so she said, hey, let's make a little room up on the wall.

You know, here you can have a place to stay. Just a gracious act of her own hospitality. And to this barren woman, he made this promise that she would embrace a son a year from that time, that the stigma associated with barrenness was very harsh in the ancient world.

And the promise of this coming son would answer the longing of her heart, and it would remove from her the stigma of her barrenness. And so this woman who is so generously provided for the material things of the prophet, God provided for her this son. And you know, at the end of verse 17, you know, you can just see the camera fading away.

And the woman's hugging her son. And oh, everything's beautiful. It's like a Hallmark special there at the end of verse 17.

But now verse 18. And the child grew. And it happened one day that he went out to his father, to the reapers.

And he said to his father, my head, my head. So he said to his servant, carry to him to his mother. When he had taken him and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon and then died.

And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, shut the door upon him and went out. Then she called her husband and said, please send me one of the young men and one of the donkeys that I may run to meet the man of God and come back. So he said, why are you going to him today? It's neither the new moon or the Sabbath.

And she said, it is well. Then she saddled a donkey and said to her servant, drive and go forward. Do not slacken the pace for me unless I tell you.

So she departed and went to the man of God at Mount Carmel. So it was that when the man of God saw her far off that he said to his servant, look, the woman, please run out and meet her and say to her, is it well with you? Is it well with your husband? Is it well with the child? And she answered, it is well. Now, when she came to the man of God at the hill, she caught him by the feet.

But I came near to push her away. But the man of God said, let her alone for her soul is in deep distress and the Lord has hidden it from me and has not told me. So she said, did I ask a son of my Lord? Did I not say, do not deceive me? Then he said to get his eye, get yourself ready and take my staff on your hand and be on your way.

If you meet anyone, do not greet him. And if anyone greets you, do not answer him, but lay my staff on the face of the child. And the mother of the child said, as the Lord lives and as your soul lives, I will not leave you.

So he arose and followed her. Now, get his eye, went on the head of them and laid the staff on the face of the child, but he was neither voice nor hearing. Therefore, he went back to meet him and told him saying, the child is not awakened.

When Elijah came into the house, there was the child lying dead on his bed. He went in, therefore shut the door behind the two of them and prayed to the Lord. And he went and lay on the child and put his mouth on his mouth, his eyes on his eyes, on his hands, on his hands.

And he stretched himself out on the child. And the flesh of the child became warm. He returned and walked back and forth in the house and went up again and stretched himself out on him.

The child sneezed seven times and the child opened his eyes. And he called Gehazi and said, call the Sunanite woman. So he called her.

And when she came into him, he said, pick up your son. So she went in, fell at his feet and bowed to the ground. Then she picked up her son and went out.

Amazing, isn't it? You can just think of the woman sitting with the dead child on her knees, that child, the miraculous promise in reward to the faithful service of the Sunanite woman. The boy tragically died on the

lap of his mother after a brief but very severe affliction. She goes and she lays him on the bed of Elijah.

By the way, I want you to notice this shows the faith of the Sunanite woman. She did not prepare for the burial of the boy. She prepared for the resurrection of the boy.

She said, let's go, let's go and see the man of God. I don't have any doubt that this woman had heard the story of Elijah, the senior prophet, the mentor prophet of Elijah, of how he raised the widow's son of Zarephath to life. And he believed that that same prophet of God who had been trained by the prophet could bring this same thing to pass.

Isn't it amazing that when Gehazi came out and greeted the woman, what did she say? Did you notice that? It is well. Was it well with the woman? Not at all. But the Sunanite woman didn't want to share her grief with Gehazi.

She wanted the man of God to hear it directly from him and not from the servant. So she came in. Elijah was amazed.

He was mystified. Don't you like that line in there where he says, the Lord has hidden it from me. He didn't know.

Elijah was so accustomed to God telling him things. But it was more surprising to him if God didn't speak to him than if God did speak to him. And so he says, go, go lay the staff on the face of the child.

Instead of going directly himself first, he sent a servant Gehazi with the staff. And again, it seems to follow the familiar pattern in the ministry that Elijah didn't often do things directly, but he did things through agents, through other people to see God work through them. But you know, it doesn't always work that way.

It didn't happen until Elijah himself came. It could be, and I don't want to get too interpretive here. It could be that God was willing to let the staff of Elijah do the work if the Sunanite woman had enough faith.

It may have been that the Sunanite woman's faith was a little bit too much in Elijah and not enough in the Lord. Now, listen, please, if that Sunanite woman is up in heaven and I'm being too critical of her, I hope she doesn't just like punch me or something when I get to heaven. I mean, listen, the woman lost her son.

I'm not trying to be critical of her. But it does seem curious how Elijah suggested this and put this into action, but it didn't work. And I think that perhaps, especially because the woman said, I will not leave you.

Perhaps if the woman said, yes, I believe that staff will work. It's what the prophet said. Let's go together, Gehazi.

But she said, no, no, no, I'm sticking with the prophet. It may be that if she would have invested her faith in that, God would have honored it. But anyway, God wanted that son raised from the dead because Elijah went in there.

He shut the door behind the two of them and it happened. He prayed after the pattern shown by his mentor, Elijah. Remember when Elijah did that? The same kind of thing.

Stretched himself out upon the child and life came back into the child. You see, Elijah prayed with great faith because he knew that God worked this way in the life of his mentor, Elijah. He prayed with great faith

because he sensed that God wanted to raise that boy from the dead.

And so here he goes. He lays himself on the child. You know, it's beautiful.

You know, one of the most ceremonially unclean things in all of Judaism is a dead body. A prophet of God should not be touching a dead body. But you know what Elijah was thinking? He was thinking, listen, first of all, the Spirit of God is leading me to do this.

And secondly, that's not going to be a dead body anymore. I'm going to stretch myself out upon it. By the way, we see the same kind of miracle happen with Elijah.

We see it happen with Elisha now. What a contrast to how Jesus raised people from the dead. Do you see Jesus stretching himself, pleading, oh Lord, please do something, please, walking back and forth.

Oh God, please do something. That's how you and I would do it. How did Jesus do it? Lazarus come forth.

Jesus commanded it to happen. What a difference. What a difference between Jesus and us.

But then the miracle happened in a beautiful way. I think it's fascinating. The child sneezed seven times, opened his eyes.

And here we have it. It's as if he was imparting his life to the child and the child came back from the dead. What a beautiful example, not only of the power of God, but of the tender love of God for this woman and her family.

Well, how about another miracle? Verse 38. After Elijah returned to Gilgal, there was famine in the land. Now the sons of the prophets were sitting before him and he said to his servant, put on the large pot and boil stew for some of the sons of the prophets.

Someone went out the field to gather herbs and found a wild vine and gathered from it a lap full of wild gourds and came and sliced them into the pot of stew, though they did not know what they were. Then they served to the men to eat. Now it happened as they were eating the stew that they cried out and said, man of God, there is death in the pot.

I think I've eaten there a time or two. And they could not eat it. So he said, bring me some flour.

And he put it into the pot and he said, serve it to the people that they may eat. And there was nothing harmful in the pot. You know, Elijah felt a special responsibility to help here.

He didn't put the poisonous gourd in the pot. But what he certainly did was he told him to go out and gather the food. You know, let's make dinner.

He started the whole thing going. He says, well, gee, they're all going to die because of me. You know, you can go through the commentaries and get these elaborate explanations as to what the kind of, you know, root was or whatever it was they put in their pot.

But, you know, it was just poisonous. That's all there was to it. And then he sprinkles a little bit of flour into it and it changes everything.

As you might expect, Charles Spurgeon is a great, great quote on this. Listen to this. Listen to what he does with this idea.

He says, you've been trying to find the pleasure in the world and you found wild vines. You've gathered wild gourds, a latful, almost a heartful. You've been shredding death into the pot and now you cannot feel as you used to feel.

The poison is stupefying your soul. While we were just singing it out, you said, I want to sing as the saints do, but there's no praise in me. If you are a worldling and not God's child, you can live on that which would poison a Christian.

But if you're a child of God, you'll cry out, oh, thou man of God, there's death in the pot. That's the difference, isn't it? I don't know. It's amazing.

It's amazing what Spurgeon would come up with. Well, there was nothing inherently purifying in the flour that he put in the pot, right? I mean, it's not like, oh, cure for poison, get some flour, put it in there. No, the real purification was in the miraculous work of God.

That was the real purification. And might I say, in the faith that they had. How would you be like, be the first one to dig in to that thing after he put the flour into it, right? That's faith, isn't it? But they did it and God blessed.

One more quote from Charles Spurgeon. There's death in the pot. How is the church to answer it? I believe it is to imitate Elisha.

We need not attempt to get the wild gourds out of the pot. They're cut up too small and there are too cunningly mixed up. They've entered too closely into the whole mass of teaching to be removed.

Who shall extract the leaven from the leavened loaf? What then? We must look to God for help and use the way indicated here. Bring flour. Good, wholesome food was cast into the poisonous stuff.

And by God's gracious working, it killed the poison. And the church must cast the blessed gospel of the grace of God into the poisoned pottage. And the false doctrine will not be able to destroy men's soul as it does now.

Hallelujah. Isn't that a great picture, though? Elisha didn't say, get all the little pieces of wild gourd out of the pot. No, he said, no, listen, you put something good into the pot.

I see, I meet, I talk with pastors sometimes, and you know what? That's exactly what they're trying to do. They're trying to get every piece of the wild vine out of the pot. Instead of trying to pick every little piece of false doctrine or corruption out.

What God wants us to do instead is to put something good into the pot. And he'll work through that. All right, how about another miracle? Verse 42, last one of the evening.

Then a man came from Baal, Shalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the first fruits, 20 loaves of barley bread and newly ripened grain in his knapsack. And he said, give it to the people that they may eat. But a servant said, what? Shall I set this before 100 men? He said again, give it to the people that they may eat.

For thus says the Lord, they shall eat and have some leftover. So he set it before them and they ate and had some leftover, according to the word of the Lord. Now, these loaves had been brought to Elijah as first fruits.

Normally, they would have been taken to priests. But because the religion in the northern kingdom was apostate and the priesthood in the northern kingdom was apostate, they said, hey, bring it to the godly man that we do know. Bring it to Elijah.

And Elijah had the right over that food. It was his. But he said, no, God wants to use this to feed many, many people.

And in this miracle that sort of anticipates Jesus's miracle of feeding the 5000, Elijah commanded that a small amount of bread be served to 100 different men. And the Lord said, this is how it's going to work. They're going to eat and have some leftover.

I want you to think about that. If you want a closing thought for tonight, you just think about that. God promised not only to provide, but to provide beyond the immediate need.

Elijah trusted the promise of God, acted upon it, and saw that promise miraculously fulfilled. Listen, God can multiply our strength. God can multiply our effectiveness.

Might say he must. What God has called us to do is greater than what we can do in ourselves. He has deliberately engineered it to where you cannot fulfill it yourself, but you must have his miraculous power working through you.

Now, we read this and we go, oh, praise the Lord. Miracles everywhere tonight. Miracles of water.

Miracles of oil. Miracles of resurrection. Miracles of death coming out of the pot.

Miracles of, you know, bread. Oh, praise the Lord. Great, great miracles.

Listen, it is great. It is wonderful. But did you see what one common thread, I think there were several, but one common thread through each one of these miracles was? It was a radical faith required.

And a faith, might I say, connected to a death to self. That is what it took faith for. In every one of these, there was some faith required connected with a death to self.

Listen, when you are spooning up that newly flowered death in the pot pot and you are there ready to eat it in your own mouth, you got to literally be willing to die to self to be able to put that spoonful in your mouth, don't you? All of these situations. The widow with her son. The digging of the ditches.

Every one of them. It is not just faith, but it is faith connected with a death to self. Listen, you know what the problem is with you, with me, with most every one of us.

We want that miracle power of God, but we don't want that death to self. May God work on us to show us how to embrace that death to self. How to realize it is not because He hates us.

I mean, are you in the midst of that refiner's fire right now? You feel like you are in that critical situation. Isn't it easy to think that God is displeased with you or He is mad at you? Sometimes it is even felt God hates you. It is not.

The death to self is because He loves you. Because He wants to see that miracle power that He has gloriously shine through you in your situation. That is what we take from this.

So let us pray together. Father, we believe with all of our hearts that you are a miracle working of God. Miracle working God.

And what we really ask you to do, Lord, is not just wonderful miracles like this. We ask you to do them, Lord. We want to see them all around us.

But Lord, we ask that you do what may be an even greater miracle in us. That you would bend us towards you so that we would gladly embrace the death to self that you have us to live. Lead us into these deep paths of faith, Lord.

And thank you for our forerunner, Jesus Christ, who has gone before us in all these things. We pray it, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen.

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