

# Satisfied to Do Little When We Should Be Doing Much

by Roger Ellsworth

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*The sermon warns against being satisfied with little when we should be doing much, using the story of King Joash's failure to achieve total victory over the Syrians as an example.*

**Duration:** 31:01

**Scripture:** 2 Kings 13:14-19, Matthew 6:33, Luke 9:62, Romans 12:11, Colossians 3:23-24, James 1:22, Revelation 3:15-16

**Topics:** "Tests"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the story of King Joash and the good cause that was placed before him. The sermon is divided into three parts: the good cause, the sufficient resources, and the missing ingredient. The preacher emphasizes the importance of being zealous and doing much for the Lord's cause, rather than being content with doing little. He encourages the congregation to support the church in preaching the gospel and to use the resources God has given, particularly the resource of prayer. The sermon concludes with a warning against being satisfied with doing little for the Lord when we are called to do much.

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## Transcript

Please find again 2 Kings chapter 13, 2 Kings chapter 13, and we're looking today at verses 14 through 19. And I think you probably know by now that I love the stories of the Old Testament. I have to force myself as a preacher to be balanced in my handling of the Bible.

And what I mean by being balanced is not camping out just in one part of the Bible and ignoring other parts. All of the Bible, all of the Bible is the Word of God. Now we're still early in this new year and I don't know that I have anything more important to say to you than that.

The whole Bible is the Word of God and this book is your key to successful living. If you're to live as God wants you to live, you must heed the message of this book. And there's no part of the Bible which is unimportant.

But I have to tell you that while all the Bible is important, it would be possible for me just to live in the great Old Testament stories. And these stories, ladies and gentlemen, continue to have meaning. They continue

to speak to us.

Now here we have the story of a king of Israel visiting Elisha and Elisha is on his death bed. Now of course you're familiar with the prophet Elisha. Few men have ever been as influential in the economy of God as this man Elisha.

My how God used Elisha. And I just urge you if you have not read the stories of Elisha for some time to go back over that ground and familiarize yourself with how God used this tremendous prophet. I dare say we could use an Elisha today.

We could use someone who has an unusual anointing of God upon him. And yes, that describes Elisha. He had an unusual anointing of God upon him.

But Elisha has come down to his death bed. Someone has observed that God changes his workmen but the work goes on. And God has used Elisha but Elisha is a man after all.

And as a man he must die. And so here he is now near death. And Joash the king comes to him.

And Joash is a man in serious trouble. Joash is, as I've already said, king of Israel. And he's seeking the help of Elisha.

Now don't let that impress you too much. This man Joash was a godless man. He, like all the other kings of Israel at this time in the history of Israel, was an idolater.

But perhaps Joash is found here at Elisha's bedside because he has enough sense to realize his idolatry hasn't been working out very well. And Joash's trouble lies right here. The Syrian army is threatening the nation of Israel.

In fact the Syrians had already taken some of the cities of Israel and they're poised to take even more cities. And so Joash is deeply concerned. And he comes here to Elisha.

And we have this story that I read a while ago. Now you may be saying, well, I got myself ready to come to church today and here this man is talking about something that happened thousands of years ago. And indeed it did.

And you may be one of those who thinks that something that happened so very long ago could not possibly have any meaning or any value for us today. Well my friends, if that's your thinking, if you're sitting here saying, ah, something that happened that long ago couldn't possibly have anything to do with me, you would be seriously mistaken. There's a message here in this passage of scripture for all of us today.

There's a message for all of us particularly who name the Lord Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. There's a message here for all Christians today. If you are a Christian who has become slack in the things of God, there's a message here for you.

If you're a Christian who has slowed up in your service to the Lord, there's a message here for you. I suggest that the message here has to do with the danger of being satisfied with little when we should be doing much. Being satisfied with doing little when we should be doing much.

That I suggest to you is the message of this passage. And I wonder if I have, I wonder if I've touched a nerve with you today. Most of us here would say that we've been saved, we've been Christians for a very long time.

You remember how it was when you were first saved? You remember the zeal that you had? You remember how you were just so grateful that the Lord Jesus Christ had plucked you out of eternal condemnation and had enrolled you in the family of God and given you promise of a home in heaven? You remember how that just thrilled you so much? You remember how early in your Christian life you felt such a tremendous debt of gratitude to the Lord Jesus Christ that you could not conceive of being asked to do something that you would not be willing to do for the Lord? You remember that? You remember thinking, no one could ask me to do something for the Lord Jesus that I would not be willing to do. I'd be willing to do anything that that anything that I would be asked to do. I just, I'm so amazed that the Lord Jesus would save me.

Well, I dare say that many of us would have to admit things have changed. We're not now where we once were. We find ourselves perhaps identifying all too readily with what the church of Ephesus there in Revelation chapter two, you remember how the Lord Jesus said, I've got something against you.

You don't love me the way you once did. And now there are many, many people who named the name of Christ that, that find lots of things to be too much for them. When it comes to serving the Lord, there was a time when they couldn't conceive of being asked to do something for the Lord Jesus that they would not be willing to do.

But now they can think of several things, several things that they're not willing to do for the Lord Jesus Christ. It seems as almost as if almost anything that they're asked to do now is too much, too much. And so I say to you, my friends, there's a danger that constantly confronts us as Christians.

And that is being satisfied to do little for the Lord. When the call is for us to do much for the Lord. Are you, are you in that category of one who is satisfied to do little for the Lord Jesus when the call of God upon your life is to do much for the Lord Jesus? Well, I hope that you will pay attention to what I have to say to you today.

And I hope and pray that the spirit of God will be pleased to use this passage to drive home his truth into our hearts. Here we have a King shooting some arrows. I hope God's spirit will shoot some arrows into our hearts today.

I'm talking about all of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We need arrows of conviction fired into our hearts about this matter of being satisfied with little when the call of God upon our lives is to do much. Now I want to divide the sermon for you into three parts today.

I want you to think with me, first of all, about the good cause, the good cause, the good cause that was placed before King Joash. And then secondly, I want you to think with me about the sufficient resources that Joash had, the sufficient resources that he had for attaining, for realizing this good cause. And then thirdly, and finally, we'll think about the missing ingredient or the missing element in Joash attaining this good cause.

So do you have the three points of the sermon now in mind? We're going to think about the good cause that was placed before Joash. We're going to think about the sufficient resources that were given to him.

And then we're going to think about the missing ingredient or the missing element, if you please.

Think with me, first of all, about the good cause that was placed before King Joash. I've already told you a little bit about the situation in which Joash found himself. Here is King of Israel, and as King of Israel, it is his job to preserve his kingdom.

I would say that would be a good cause, wouldn't you, to preserve the kingdom that God had committed to him, that God had put, we might say, in his care. Joash was, as all the kings of Israel, he was a steward. The kingdom really belonged to God, and Joash's job was to hold that kingdom in trust for God.

He was to hold that kingdom in trust for God, and he was to preserve that kingdom for the honor of God. And here he is now, King of Israel, and he's got this responsibility, but things are not going well because, as I've already told you, the Syrians were posing a very serious threat. They had not only taken these cities of Israel, but it looked as if the whole kingdom of Israel might be destroyed.

And so here Joash is in serious trouble. He's got this good cause. The good cause is to preserve the kingdom of Israel, but it looks as if that good cause is not going to be realized.

And so having said that about the good cause placed before Joash, I want you to think with me now about the sufficient resources that were given to Joash. Joash does a good thing here. He would have been in a far better position if he had done this thing more often.

The good thing that he does here is he comes to the prophet Elisha. The old man is wasting away. He's in his dying hours, but when Joash comes to him, the old prophet is able to rally his strength, and he's able to offer Joash help in this situation.

And what he does here is this. He tells Joash to take a bow and some arrows, and Joash complies. And then we read that Elisha lays his hands on the hands of Joash, and he commands Joash to fire an arrow out the window.

And as the arrow flies through the air, well, you see there in verse 17 what Elisha says. He says, the arrow of the Lord's deliverance and the arrow of deliverance from Syria. That's what the arrow represented.

Deliverance, victory, if you please, over Syria. And so we have here Elisha laying his hands on the hands of Joash, and you have Elisha here declaring that the arrow flying through the air is the arrow of victory. And I tell you that in doing these things, Elisha was really telling Joash that everything that he needed, everything that he needed for victory over Syria, everything he needed was being committed to him.

Joash was being given sufficiency for the crisis that he was in. He was being given sufficient resources for the situation that he was facing. Think for a moment about Elisha laying his hands on the hands of Joash.

What did that mean? What did that represent? What did that convey? Well, I don't think there's any difficulty here. I think that by doing this, Elisha was symbolically communicating the power of God to Joash. He was transferring, as it were, the power of God over to Joash.

He was saying to Joash that God will give you sufficient power to accomplish the task. He will give you sufficient power to achieve victory over the Syrians. That was a symbolic act, I say.

Elisha laying his hands on the hands of Joash, communicating, as it were, divine power to Joash to achieve the task that was there at hand. And then you have not only Elisha laying his hands on the hands

of King Joash, but you have him also declaring that this arrow that Joash shot was the arrow of victory. It represented a victory over the Syrians.

So now you not only have Joash being given, as it were, divine power, but you also have Joash being given a divine promise. This arrow is the arrow of victory. You're going to have victory, Joash, over the Syrians.

And so, my, what resources Joash is given here. He's given everything that he needs to achieve the victory that he desires over the Syrians. And that brings me then to the third thing, which is the missing element here.

And I have to tell you now we're in an area of mystery here. But the area of mystery has to do with God using human instrumentality. Using human instrumentality.

I'm going to talk to you about, going to identify here for you in just a moment, the missing ingredient in this. Joash is given a good cause. That good cause is to protect the nation of Israel over whom he has been given charge.

He has been given sufficient resources. He's been given the divine power and he's been given a divine promise. But Joash himself has to, has to desire, Joash himself has to have a sufficient desire to accomplish the task.

And so, Elisha devises a test for him. He has already shot one arrow and there are five or six arrows remaining. And Elisha says to him, take the arrows that remain and strike the ground.

Now there's a debate among the commentators as to whether that means that Joash was to shoot the remaining arrows and strike the ground by shooting the arrows or whether he was just to take them in his hand and strike the ground, hit the floor of the room. And it doesn't really matter. It really amounts to the same thing.

So, so please don't go off here on a side issue and let that absorb you so that you lose sight of the main issue. The main issue, I say, is Elisha's putting Joash to the test. He tells him to take the arrows that remain, strike the ground.

And we read here, well, look there at verse 18. He, Joash, struck three times and he stopped. And the man of God was angry with him and said in verse 19, you should have struck five or six times.

Then you would have struck Syria till you had destroyed it. But now you will strike Syria only three times. And here's the missing element, my friends.

Joash himself does not have the will to achieve the victory that needs to be, that needed to be achieved. He did not have the will. We might say here that the problem, the missing element was Joash having the heart, having the heart to achieve the victory that the Lord wanted to give to the nation of Israel.

The difference between total victory and partial victory, the difference between total victory and partial victory was lying right there in the heart of Joash himself. And that's where the problem was. The difference between total victory and partial victory was in the heart of Joash himself.

If Joash had been totally zealous, he would have had a total victory, but he was only partially zealous. And so he was to enjoy only a partial victory over the Syrians. And so even though he had the sufficient

resources to achieve total victory, Joash, by being satisfied with less than what he should have been satisfied with, being satisfied with little, he did not achieve the total victory that he could have had.

And as you read further here in 2 Kings chapter 13, you'll find that the words of Elisha come true to the letter. You'll find that Joash achieved victory over the Syrians only three times. He managed to take back from the Syrians only three of the cities that had been captured by the Syrians.

And so this is the story as we have it here in 2 Kings chapter 13. And I have tried to identify for you the major parts of this story. But we've only come halfway here in looking at the story and identifying the major parts of the story.

The rest of the task that lies before us is to ask this question, what does it have to do with us? It's not enough just to read an Old Testament story and say, well, that makes for interesting reading, that makes for entertaining reading. No. The New Testament tells us that all of these Old Testament stories were written for our benefit.

They were written for our instruction. They're here as examples to us. They're here to guide us in this matter of living.

Now I have a message for us today, the Parkview family. I want to tell you that I can draw a line from each of the major parts of this story to our church family today. Let's do this.

Talked about how Joash was given a good cause and that good cause was to preserve the King of Israel, the kingdom over which God had placed him. Let me ask you a question, member of the Parkview family. Do you believe that we have a good cause as a church family? Do you believe we have a good cause? Do you believe that Parkview has a good reason for being here? Do you believe that we are here on high and holy business? Well, I hope you do.

I put on the back page of the of the bulletin today a statement about the business of Parkview Church and I hope that you've taken time to read it. It's there on the back page of the bulletin. The supreme object of this work is to glorify God.

The only power that can enable us to do this is that of the Holy Spirit. The medium through which the Holy Spirit works is the Word of God. I ask you, do you think this is a good cause? The cause that we here at Parkview Church have? Do you think it's a good cause to glorify God? Do you think it is a good cause to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ? By the way, there's nothing that so glorifies God as the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Do you think that we are here for a good reason? Do you think that we are here to accomplish a good cause? Do you think that we are here on high and holy business? I hope that you say yes, because my friends, this church can't make progress. We can't move forward until we are all agreed that we are here on important business, that Parkview has important business, that we are here for a good reason and for a good cause. And now I want to draw a line from the second part of the story to our church.

The first part is a good cause, and I've talked about how we're here on a good cause. The second part of the story, as you recall, is the sufficient resources that that Joash had been given, and he was given the power of God. That was conveyed through the hands of Elisha, and he was given the divine promise, the promise of victory over the Syrians.

God has given us sufficient resources to accomplish the purpose for which this church exists. I hope that you noticed when I was reading there from the back page of the bulletin a while ago, the supreme object of this work is to glorify God. The only power that can enable us to do this is that of the Holy Spirit.

But we have the Holy Spirit of God, ladies and gentlemen. The Holy Spirit of God has been promised to the people of God, to achieve the work of God. So we have a sufficient resource today.

God has promised to give his power to his people. If his people will seek that power. And that brings me to the third connecting line from that story to this present, to our present situation, to this church.

We're here on a good cause. We've been given sufficient resources to achieve the good cause. Now here's the third thing, and that is the missing element.

Is what was missing with Joash missing with us today? What was missing with Joash? You might say, well, I've already told you. It was the zeal to accomplish the task. It was the heart to accomplish the task.

Well, Elisha had conveyed to him the power of God. You've got the power of God to do this thing, to achieve victory. And that power will achieve victory.

But all my friends, here's the area of mystery I was talking about a while ago. God can work without us, but God has chosen to work with us and through us. God who does not need human instrumentality has chosen to work through human instrumentality.

And because God has chosen to work through human instruments, it is absolutely vital, brothers and sisters in Christ, that we be the kind of instruments through whom God can work. And what kind of instruments, what kind of instruments must we be if God is going to work through us? Well, we must be instruments that are not satisfied with doing as little as we possibly can. We must be instruments that are desiring to do as much as we possibly can.

Joash, having been told clearly by Elisha that those arrows represented victory over Syria, was content to only strike the ground three times. He should have struck it five or six times, but he was content to do little when he should have done much. And so he could not be the human instrument for complete victory over Syria.

And I'm asking the Parkview family this morning, are we instruments that God can use in achieving this good cause that he has given us? The good cause is glorifying him primarily through the preaching of his gospel. But here's the question. Are we instruments that God can use to achieve this good cause? Do we have enough zeal to be instruments in God's hand? Or are we content to be doing little today when we should be doing much? Now, there's so much that you can do to support this church as this church preaches the gospel of Jesus Christ.

One thing you can do is by being present here. Thank God that you are today. But my, this is a battle that many, many people are losing today, the battle to be faithful in attendance to the house of God.

And I tell you, if we are content to get by with just as little as we possibly can, we can't be instruments that God can use to achieve much. And what about the business of prayer? I've talked about how God has promised his power to us, but the truth of the matter is God's power is unleashed only as the people of God seek that power in prayer. Now, how are you doing in your prayer life? Well, most of us have to admit to our shame that we, when it comes to praying, we're much like Joash.

We're content to strike the ground just three times instead of five or six. Oh, I tell you, if you believe that Parkview is here for a good cause, it's important. And if you believe that God has given us sufficient resources, it is important that you and I use the resources that God has given us.

And one of the primary resources, of course, is the resource of prayer. So this is the burden of my heart today, and I trust it's now the burden of your heart. In a cause that requires much of us, are we doing much or are we content to do little? Let's bow together for prayer.

Father, we thank you for this time around your word, and we find, Lord, that your word often searches us, and we need to be searched. And, Lord, most of us here today profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and it hasn't been that long ago that we were filled with zeal, filled with longing, filled with a yearning to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, to do all that we could do. But now, Father, to our shame, many of us would have to admit that we're not trying to do much.

We're content to do little. Lord, convict us today. Help us, Father, to once again believe in the depths of our hearts that you have put us here on important business.

You've given us resources sufficient to achieve that business. Now, Father, impress it upon our hearts that the only question that remains is whether we are sufficiently yearning to achieve the good cause that you have given us here at this church. Father, help us to win victories today, victories against our apathy and our indifference, victory over our inclination to be satisfied with little.

Lord, win victories this day in our hearts. To the praise of your name, we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

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