

Cast of Characters:

Remarkable Lessons from Unknown People

8.10.25

Message 1

2 Kings

2 Kings 3:1–27 (CSB)

ISRAEL'S KING JORAM

3 Joram son of Ahab became king over Israel in Samaria during the eighteenth year of Judah's King Jehoshaphat, and he reigned twelve years. ² He did what was evil in the Lord's sight, but not like his father and mother, for he removed the sacred pillar of Baal his father had made. ³ Nevertheless, Joram clung to the sins that Jeroboam son of Nebat had caused Israel to commit. He did not turn away from them.

MOAB'S REBELLION AGAINST ISRAEL

⁴ King Mesha of Moab was a sheep breeder. He used to pay the king of Israel one hundred thousand lambs and the wool of one hundred thousand rams, ⁵ but when Ahab died, the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel. ⁶ So King Joram marched out from Samaria at that time and mobilized all Israel. ⁷ Then he sent a message to King Jehoshaphat of Judah: "The king of Moab has rebelled against me. Will you go with me to fight against Moab?"

Jehoshaphat said, "I will go. I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses."

⁸ He asked, "Which route should we take?"

He replied, "The route of the Wilderness of Edom."

⁹ So the king of Israel, the king of Judah, and the king of Edom set out. After they had traveled their indirect route for seven days, they had no water for the army or the animals with them.

¹⁰ Then the king of Israel said, "Oh no, the Lord has summoned these three kings, only to hand them over to Moab."

¹¹ But Jehoshaphat said, "Isn't there a prophet of the Lord here? Let's inquire of the Lord through him."

One of the servants of the king of Israel answered, "Elisha son of Shaphat, who used to pour water on Elijah's hands, is here."

¹² Jehoshaphat affirmed, "The word of the Lord is with him." So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went to him.

¹³ However, Elisha said to King Joram of Israel, "What do we have in common? Go to the prophets of your father and your mother!"

But the king of Israel replied, "No, because it is the Lord who has summoned these three kings to hand them over to Moab."

¹⁴ Elisha responded, "By the life of the Lord of Armies, before whom I stand: If I did not have respect for King Jehoshaphat of Judah, I wouldn't look at you; I would not take notice of you. ¹⁵ Now, bring me a musician."

While the musician played, the Lord's hand came on Elisha. ¹⁶ Then he said, "This is what the Lord says: 'Dig ditch after ditch in this wadi.' ¹⁷ For the Lord says, 'You will not see wind or rain, but the wadi will be filled with water, and you will drink—you and your cattle and your animals.' ¹⁸ This is easy in the Lord's sight. He will also hand Moab over to you. ¹⁹ Then you will attack every fortified city and every choice city. You will cut down every good tree and stop up every spring. You will ruin every good piece of land with stones."

²⁰ About the time for the grain offering the next morning, water suddenly came from the direction of Edom and filled the land.

²¹ All Moab had heard that the kings had come up to fight against them. So all who could bear arms, from the youngest to the oldest, were summoned and took their stand at the border. ²² When they got up early in the morning, the sun was shining on the water, and the Moabites saw that the

water across from them was red like blood. ²³ "This is blood!" they exclaimed. "The kings have crossed swords and their men have killed one another. So, to the spoil, Moab!"

²⁴ However, when the Moabites came to Israel's camp, the Israelites attacked them, and they fled from them. So Israel went into the land attacking the Moabites. ²⁵ They would destroy the cities, and each of them would throw a stone to cover every good piece of land. They would stop up every spring and cut down every good tree. This went on until only the buildings of Kir-hareseth were left. Then men with slings surrounded the city and attacked it.

²⁶ When the king of Moab saw that the battle was too fierce for him, he took seven hundred swordsmen with him to try to break through to the king of Edom, but they could not do it. ²⁷ So he took his firstborn son, who was to become king in his place, and offered him as a burnt offering on the city wall. Great wrath was on the Israelites, and they withdrew from him and returned to their land.

Intro. The Unknown People

A. Historians and Bible Scholars love to talk about people no one has ever heard of.

1. We are the kind of people who love to spout random facts at parties and random trivia in sermons.
2. We come alive at trivia nights, and if you are over the age of 50, you are the kind of person yelling at the TV while watching Jeopardy or fact-checking people on Facebook.
3. Scripture mentions by name hundreds if not thousands of people.
4. Some are memorable, like King David or Mary.
5. Others are just a name in a list.

B. Then there are the people who are either named, but forgotten, or who are never named at all.

1. Even though these people are recorded in the most published book of all time, I would guess most of us are far more familiar with

characters from Harry Potter, The Lord of the Rings, or a Mark Twain novel than we are with people from 2 Kings.

2. Picture with me a time of chaos.

C. A Civil War split God's people into the North and the South.

1. The North was 10 tribes that set up their own temple and capital in a city called Samaria.

a. They have their own priests and prophets, all of whom are false.

b. They are sometimes at war with the southern kingdom and sometimes they are allies.

2. The southern kingdom is called Judah.

a. These are two of the twelve tribes and are based in and around Jerusalem.

b. They had Solomon's temple, the real priesthood, and the sons of David were kings.

c. But they were not always righteous either.

D. Within our text, we are introduced to several persons.

1. Because Scripture teaches that all of Scripture is inspired, and all of it is profitable, that means we should pay attention to all of Scripture.

2. Even the historical books.

3. That also means that the people mentioned in these passages serve as examples to us.

4. Let's look at the first person mentioned in this passage.

1. Person #1: Joram.

A. Joram or Jehoram was the grandson of Ahab and Jezebel (there is a name you know about).

1. Joram wasn't as wicked as his parents and grandparents, but he was still wicked.

2. Notice how Scripture chooses to remember him:

² He did what was evil in the Lord's sight, but not like his father and mother, for he removed the sacred pillar of Baal his father had made.

³ Nevertheless, Joram clung to the sins that Jeroboam son of Nebat had caused Israel to commit. He did not turn away from them.

B. This leads us to our first propositional truth: **Being more righteous than someone else is not the standard.**

1. The standard is that which is put before us in the image of Jesus.

2. The only image we are to conform to is the image of Jesus.

3. Romans 8:29 tells us we are predestined to be conformed to the image of Jesus.

a. To conform is to be shaped and molded into the likeness.

b. It's like making Jello: If you put Jello into a container, it takes the shape of the container.

c. We are shaped like the container we are placed in. Therefore, we must ask are we "In Christ Jesus" or are we in the world?

C. Joram was better than his parents but still wicked.

1. He clung to the sins of Jeroboam, who had split the kingdom and set up false worship in Samaria.

2. Notice the word "clung".

3. He refused to let go.

a. He fought to keep the very things that were the downfall of his family and his nation.

b. He wouldn't turn or repent from those ways.

c. Don't we do the same?

4. Many of us cling to sins, behaviors, and attitudes that are killing us.

- a. We cling to that which is adding to our sin, tarnishing our legacy, and negating the anointing.
- b. Are you clinging to sin?
- c. Are you clinging to attitudes and actions that are grieving the Holy Spirit?

The second person contrasts the King of Israel.

2. Person #2 King Jehosaphat

A. Jehosaphat is the king of Judah.

- 1. He has been in this situation before.
- 2. In 1 Kings 22, Jehosaphat had been summoned by King Ahab, Joram's grandfather, to fight an enemy.
- 3. That time, Jehosaphat asked for a prophet of God to come, whose name was Micaiah.
 - a. That battle didn't end well, and King Ahab was killed on the battlefield.
 - b. But Jehosaphat was spared because he was a faithful king.

B. Once again, Jehosaphat has been asked to assist a king of Israel in a conflict.

- 1. We read that this battle has a miraculous ending.
- 2. A stranded, thirsty army defeats the enemy because of a miracle from God.
- 3. Notice how these kings respond to the crisis.
 - a. Pain is never neutral.
 - b. Crisis reveals our foundations and exposes what has been deposited in us.

3. Crisis

A. A vassal king revolted against the King of Israel.

1. This rebelling king was a significant contributor to the economy, and his defection cost the king greatly.

- a. The most reasonable plan was to attack and punish him.

- b. A problem was the enemy had built forts along the main path.

2. It made sense for these kings to attack from the rear of the enemy.

3. The attack through the indirect route took them through a wilderness with no water.

B. Have you ever had a really good plan that didn't work out?

1. We've all made decisions that made sense on paper.

2. Unless the Lord directs our plans, even the best plans fail.

3. Now, the three kings were on the edge of disaster.

C. Do you find yourself on the edge of disaster?

1. I know you're not leading an army into potential disaster.

2. But maybe you are leading your family into a potential disaster.

- a. You thought you were doing right, and now it is all falling apart.

- b. You don't know what to do in your own life, in your family, or at work.

- c. People are depending on you, yet you see no hope.

D. Disasters reveal our picture of God.

1. For the king of Israel, he perceived that God brought him there to destroy him. Vs. 10

2. He saw God as someone leading him into a trap, and he probably deserved it.

3. Israel's king didn't deserve a miracle or God's help.
 - a. Can I just say it: You don't deserve a miracle either.
 - b. I don't deserve a miracle.
 - c. I haven't earned divine intervention.
4. But **God's faithfulness doesn't hinge upon our worthiness.**
 - a. God doesn't move because I'm worthy, but because He is.
 - b. It isn't my righteousness that saves me, but Jesus'!
 - c. I can live righteously because of the presence of God living in me.

4. Responses

- A. **The King of Israel couldn't call upon a God he didn't know.**
 1. Intellectually, the King of Israel knew about God.
 - a. He had a doctrine or a theology but not a belief.
 - b. He attributed the disaster to the God of Israel, but he didn't know how to call upon Him.
 - c. **He talked about God but didn't talk TO God.**
 2. This is exactly like the situation in the book of Job, where Job's friends talked about God, but only Job spoke to God.
 3. How often do we talk about God, but don't speak to God?
 - a. We use religious language, but ignore God.
 - b. We talk about God but don't talk to God.
 - c. The king of Israel attributed the disaster to the plan of God but had not sought Him.

Contrast this with the King of Judah.

- B. **The King of Judah knew to seek the Lord, but didn't know where or to whom to call.**

2 Kings 3:11a (CSB) ¹¹But Jehoshaphat said, "Isn't there a prophet of the LORD here? Let's inquire of the LORD through him."

1. King Jehosophat had been in this predicament before.
2. He knew to call for a prophet of God to give direction.
 - a. It's important to note that they did not have the same access to God as we do.
 - b. Because of Jesus and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we do not need special words from special people.
3. The king of Israel had surrounded himself by false prophets.

2 Kings 3:13 (CSB)

¹³However, Elisha said to King Joram of Israel, "What do we have in common? Go to the prophets of your father and your mother!"

But the king of Israel replied, "No, because it is the LORD who has summoned these three kings to hand them over to Moab."

- a. These false prophets were great as things were going well.
- b. But they failed when times were hard.
- c. **We all accumulate false prophets in our lives:**
 1. Voices that tell us what we want and confirm what we desire.
 2. These voices sound like our friends until we encounter disaster, suffering, pain, or trouble.
 3. Then, where do we turn?
4. The king of Israel didn't think of turning to God.
 - a. He blamed God.
 - b. He attributed disaster to God.
 - c. But he didn't consider repenting and turning to God.

5. The king of Judah wanted to talk to God but didn't know where to find him.

a. A recurring theme will start to develop in 2 Kings:

b. The leaders of Israel couldn't lead the people spiritually.

6. Leaders can't lead others to places where they haven't been.

a. In the words of the book "Lead with Prayer", you can't multiply zero.

b. You can't withdraw from an empty account.

c. You can't lead others if you haven't been leading yourself.

Thankfully, God is gracious and has a way of placing anonymous people in the right positions at the right time.

5. Person #3: A servant of the king of Israel.

2 Kings 3:11 (CSB)

"But Jehoshaphat said, "Isn't there a prophet of the LORD here? Let's inquire of the LORD through him."

One of the servants of the king of Israel answered, "Elisha son of Shaphat, who used to pour water on Elijah's hands, is here."

A. A servant of a wicked king understood what the kings of nations didn't.

1. He knew that Elisha was nearby.

2. He knew that Elisha was a man of God.

3. Jehoshaphat confirmed that the word of the Lord is with Elisha in Verse 12.

a. But why didn't the king say anything?

b. Why did he act confused about what to do until an anonymous voice spoke up?

4. Courage is contagious.

- a. The servant spoke up, and that led Jehosophat to speak up.
- b. Spiritual courage is contagious.
- c. That is why we need to be in a body of believers who encourage and challenge us.
- d. The words to Joshua still ring true: Be strong and very courageous.

B. This anonymous servant was responsible for saving the armies of Israel and Judah.

- 1. Never underestimate how God might use you.
- 2. Yes, even you, an unknown servant of a wicked man.
- 3. Because of the righteousness of King Jehoshaphat, they sought the Lord through the prophet Elisha.
- 4. Because of the faithfulness of a servant in the king's court, they knew who to call and where to find him.

C. God doesn't call all of us to lead nations or prophesy to kings.

- 1. But God does strategically and intentionally place us where He needs us.
- 2. Are you willing to serve, even when you remain anonymous?
- 3. Will you be faithful all your life, in situations and circumstances beyond your control, all for that one opportunity?
- 4. Let's look at another character who was found faithful when called upon.

6. Person #4: An unknown musician. Vs 15b.

2 Kings 3:15 (CSB)

¹⁵Now, bring me a musician."

While the musician played, the LORD's hand came on Elisha.

A. Elisha the prophet is the main character in this story.

1. When this man spoke, he spoke with the weight of God's covenant.
 - a. People died at his word.
 - b. Nations ceased, kingdoms were toppled, and the dead were raised.
 - c. His title might have said "prophet", but he was the most powerful spiritual influence in the land.
2. When he was asked to speak on the Lord's behalf, he needed a moment of preparation.
3. He calls for a musician.
 - a. For someone like me, this captures my attention.
 - b. The most powerful men in the land now invite someone without a name

B. We have no idea who this musician was.

1. He remains anonymous for all of history, yet he serves during a climactic moment in God's redemptive history.
2. His job: to set the atmosphere so that Elisha could hear from God.
 - a. God didn't need the musician; Elisha did.
 - b. God was ready to speak, but Elisha wasn't.
 - c. God had the answers; Elisha didn't.
 - d. God knew the solution; Elisha had to wait and receive it.

3. Place yourself in the story.

C. A messenger arrives to you, sent by the combined order of the kings of Israel and Judah and the prophet Elisha.

1. Hey, grab your best instrument and hurry. The prophet needs you.
 - a. Maybe it was a short distance, or it was several miles.

- b. You hurry because if you get this wrong, it could be your head.
- c. Your heart beats quickly because you sense that there is a lot at stake.
- d. You know you and your friends are dying from thirst, trapped in a wilderness.
- e. So you prepare to summon the last of your strength, the last of your breath, and the last of your mouth's saliva to worship the Lord.

2. Perhaps he had played for kings or maybe not.

- a. Maybe this musician was a descendant of the musicians who played for the first king of Israel, Saul.
- b. Perhaps he was trained by the sons of Korah and had ministered at the temple.
- c. Maybe, he was a musician attached to the soldiers, kind of like the drummers were for the Armies of a century or two ago, or a bagpiper.
- d. How nervous he probably was to look over and see Elisha, dressed not like a king but a prophet, wearing Elijah's mantle.
- e. Elijah's eyes closed, praying and trying to hear from God.
- f. The kings and their retinue stand off in the corner, dressed in royal clothes, giving orders to kill the musician first if this doesn't work.

3. Imagine playing for several minutes when all of a sudden, the Lord's hand comes upon Elisha.

- a. He stops so as not to be in the way.
- b. He hears the word of the Lord through the prophet.
- c. Maybe he leaves before the word is finished.

d. Perhaps he is dismissed so as not to hear the plans far above his pay grade.

D. I'm captivated by how important this moment was.

1. The instrument isn't named because it doesn't matter.
2. The length of time isn't given.
3. But we know that a musician, with skill and anointing, played in such a way that Elisha could hear from God.

E. The music we entertain influences the atmosphere and attitude.

1. Humans apply this to every arena of life.
2. Our world is never without music.
 - a. Music in movies tells us what to feel or anticipate.
 - b. Music in restaurants, bars, or clubs establishes direction and the right kind of "energy."
 - c. The music in our homes, cars, and on our playlists either prepares us for God or something else.

F. There are two responsibilities here.

1. Church musicians and singers, you have the responsibility to be ready to lead people into the presence of God.
 - a. No one can do this for you.
 - b. You must be ready, prepared, and faithful.
 - c. You must steward the gifts and talents that God has given you.
 - d. The very room, the very atmosphere with which you are called to steward, depends on your faithfulness.
2. Worshippers have a responsibility to engage with the Lord.
 - a. Musicians set the atmosphere, but you must engage it.

b. If you do not worship when it is time to worship, you miss out.

c. Take it a step further: When you do not worship when it is time to worship, those depending on your worship miss out.

Lastly, I want to point our attention to an unknown whose presence in the text is so shocking that we must talk about him.

7. Person #5. An Unknown sacrifice. Vs 27

2 Kings 3:26–27 (CSB)

²⁶ When the king of Moab saw that the battle was too fierce for him, he took seven hundred swordsmen with him to try to break through to the king of Edom, but they could not do it. ²⁷ So he took his firstborn son, who was to become king in his place, and offered him as a burnt offering on the city wall. Great wrath was on the Israelites, and they withdrew from him and returned to their land.

A. This was a known practice in that part of the world.

1. Deut. 12:31 warned the Israelites not to be like the inhabitants of the land who sacrifice their children in the fire to their gods.
2. We also have non-biblical evidence of this story.
3. A stele¹ dated to the ninth century BC was found and translated, detailing this story from the Moabite perspective.
4. From their perspective, the Moabite god was punishing Moab through Israel and the victory they experienced was because of the god Chemosh intervening.

B. How do we interpret this?

¹ <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-artifacts/inscriptions/what-does-the-mesha-stele-say/>

1. One possibility: when the people of Moab saw how desperate the situation was, that the king would sacrifice his own son, they rallied and fought with desperation.

a. The sacrifice of the heir would make for a sign of desperation.

b. Perhaps they got the message: If they don't fight, then they are already dead, so what is there to lose!

c. This is the understanding of many biblical scholars.

2. Second possibility: the king of Moab's sacrifice to the gods unleashed demonic power.

a. Clearly, he sacrificed him as a burnt offering in front of everyone.

b. There is spiritual power in the shedding of blood.

c. For reasons I don't understand, it appears that the sacrifice of the male heir unleashed a form of spiritual warfare that God's people weren't prepared for.

C. The sacrifice of children has always pointed to spiritual warfare and conflict.

1. God asking Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, and then intervening, demonstrated that Abraham's God was not like the other gods.

a. God did not need the blood of Isaac to be appeased.

b. Instead, God is pleased by faith.

2. The abortion and murder of the Hebrew infants during the Exodus was a diabolical plot to prevent the blessing of God from competing with the gods of Egypt.

3. It is also no accident that God sent His only begotten Son to die for our sins.

a. This makes Christians terribly uncomfortable, yet notice Scripture:

1 John 1:7 (CSB)

⁷If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

Romans 5:9 (NLT)

⁹ And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation.

Ephesians 1:7 (NLT)

⁷ He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins.

D. This reality is still at work today.

1. The abortion of children has a spiritual cost we are not able to comprehend.
2. Social commentator Matt Walsh² shared a video this week of a school teacher justifying the kindness of ancient Incans who drugged their child sacrifices before offering them to appease their gods.
3. I cannot help but wonder if we are sacrificing our families and children upon altars without grasping what we are doing?

E. Are you sacrificing the next generation for victory today?

1. Yes, the king of Moab won and lived another day.
2. But he lived a life that did not include his firstborn son.
3. Victory at any price doesn't always end up feeling like victory.

² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zy_ipSgTReQ

How should I live in light of 2 Kings 3?

#1. Pain reveals our perspectives.

A. Who we believe God is not shown in our doctrine but in our practice.

1. When difficulty and crisis comes, do we actually turn to God?
2. Do we know how to find Him?
3. Do we know how to hear from Him?
4. Unlike the kings in our passage, we ALL can call upon Jesus for ourselves.

B. But do we?

1. Pain is never neutral.
2. As you endure in this season, are you drawing closer to God?
3. Is the crisis pushing you to your knees in worship or are you trying to find relief and answers from somewhere else?
 - a. Are you drinking more?
 - b. Are you viewing more pornography?
 - c. Are you eating more junk food?
 - d. Are you numbing the pain with endless scrolling and media?
4. Or are you praying like never before?
 - a. Are you turning the worship up?
 - b. Are you digging into Scripture?
 - c. Are you speaking to one another, as one who fears the Lord?

C. If the answer is no, then start today!

1. Don't wait until tomorrow.
2. Don't put it off until school starts.

3. Instead, seek God today!

#2. God calls me to serve wherever God has placed me.

A. John Maxwell says that Positional leadership is the lowest form of leadership.

1. This means that if your influence comes only from your title, you're the lowest kind of leader.

2. We are called to lead not out of position, but out of relationship.

B. This means:

1. Men, lead your wives not because you are their husband but because you love them.

2. Parents, lead your families not from the position of "parent" but out of a genuine love for them.

3. People, serve your organizations not out of compulsion but out of the depth of your relationship with God.

C. When we are committed to serving wherever God has placed us, we realize we are serving God, not people or organizations.

1. If you do that, it doesn't matter if your title is king or servant, president or "Hey, You".

2. Because you serve the greatest king and the greatest leader.

3. And Jesus, who Himself took the position of a servant, set ultimate example of leadership and servanthood.

3#. Be Like Jesus. Period

A. The goal is not to be better than your parents.

1. The goal is not to be more righteous than the hypocrites.

2. The goal is not to be even better today than I was yesterday.

3. The goal is to be like Christ.

B. When we read stories in the Scripture, we will often say things like:

1. Be like David who killed giants, worshipped God, etc.
2. Be like Job, who was faithful when he lost everything.
3. Be like Abraham, who was willing to sacrifice his son, or DON'T be like Abraham and listen to your wife when she says it's ok to sleep with another woman.
4. But our goal is NEVER to be like David, or like Elisha or like Abraham.

C. Our goal is to be like Jesus.

1. Let the examples of these great people of faith teach us valuable lessons that point us to examples of faithfulness.
2. But our example is Jesus.

Our time at the Table reminds us of who it is we serve.

A. That Jesus, the Son of God, was willing to be the Suffering Servant.

1. While humanity clings to sin, clings to power, and clings to our lives, notice this about Jesus. From the NLT

2. Philippians 2:5–11 (NLT)

⁵ You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

⁶ Though he was God,

he did not think of equality with God

as something to cling to.

⁷ Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;

he took the humble position of a slave

and was born as a human being.

When he appeared in human form,

⁸ he humbled himself in obedience to God

and died a criminal's death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor

and gave him the name above all other names,

¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.

B. It is this very Jesus that we come before, in prayer, in communion, and worship.

Prayer.