

More Than Meets the Eye

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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Tonight I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of 2 Kings 3 and one of the reasons that I'm drawn to the story here in 2 Kings 3, even though it is one of 24 very specific miracles that we see at the hands of Elijah and Elisha in the Old Testament, is because it is one of those miracles that I believe that whether we know it or not, we can see it take place in our own lives and we may not even call it the miraculous.

Now just to kind of give you a little insight as we prepare for 2 Kings 3, we're gonna begin in verse 16. We find ourselves in a very familiar position, those who have been called upon to lead the people of Israel in the north and even Judah in the south, find themselves again in a position contrary to the things of God, whether it be the images that are being made, the false worship that's being advocated, or even in some sense it's just the turning of the head so as not to observe that which they know is wrong. Again, we see the leadership stray, we see the people astray, and, yes, once again, we see the enemies of Israel coming and desiring to overtake them. Now there's not 32 countries like we saw this morning, there's only 3 in this case but anytime you're outnumbered, no matter what the number is, anytime you're out-armed, it always causes concern.

I want to pick up the story in verse 16 of 2 Kings 3. Elisha, the prophet of God who we'll talk about in just a moment, followed Elijah, has been commissioned to go to the benefit of the Israelites. It says there in verse 16,

16 And he said, Thus saith the LORD, Make this valley full of ditches.

I'm gonna push pause for just a moment. It doesn't sound very miraculous, does it? If the Lord came to you tonight and said, "Go start digging ditches," would you think that he was up to something great? If the Lord said, "Here's the shovel, there's the dirt, get after it," would you obediently praise the Lord and say, "Thank you, God! You're gonna do something great today!" No. What would we typically say? "God, why am I having to do this. Isn't there somebody else that could do this? Isn't there a piece of machinery we could rent to do this? Why dig ditches?" And the reason that's important to the story is one of the reasons I'm drawn to it, is we see God do the miraculous in the midst of that which is not just mundane but that which most of us would avoid at all costs.

Verse 17,

17 For thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts. 18 And this is but a light thing in the sight of the LORD: he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand. 19 And ye shall smite every fenced city, and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree, and stop all wells of water, and mar every good piece of land with stones. 20 And it came to pass in the morning, when the meat offering was offered, that, behold, there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water. 21 And when all the Moabites heard that the kings were come up to fight against them, they gathered all that were able to put on armour, and upward, and stood in the border. 22 And they rose up early in the morning, and the sun shone upon the water, and the Moabites saw the water on the other side as red as blood: 23 And they said, This is blood: the kings are surely slain, and they have smitten one another: now therefore, Moab, to the spoil. 24 And when they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and smote the Moabites, so that they fled before them: but they went forward smiting the Moabites, even into their own country.

As we look at this story tonight, it truly is more than meets the eye, and so that is oftentimes in our life when the Lord asks us to do something that may seem menial in our eyes, it may seem mundane in our eyes, it may seem trivial in our eyes, but just like in 2 Kings 3 oftentimes when the Lord is behind it, there is so much more than meets the eye.

Now before we get to the specifics of this miracle, I want to talk about the precedence that has been laid, particularly in the life of Elijah and now Elisha. These are two of the great prophets that the Lord used, now very different than the prophets we know of Scripture such as Isaiah and Jeremiah and Daniel and such. Even though we have their messages, even though we have their miracles, there is no specific book of the Bible that is attributed to either Elijah or Elisha.

Now Elijah was interesting in a lot of ways. We actually have songs that have been written in light of his life such as, "Swing low, sweet chariot," the old soulful song was about his departure into the heavens; or even an Academy Award winning film, "Chariots of Fire," that was named after that chariot of fire that came and swooped him up there in chapter 2 of 2 Kings. What's interesting is he is a character that is so well-known in the Bible but there are only eight miracles at his hand. Now don't get me wrong, that's eight more than I've done but when we think of someone with the name Elijah, oftentimes we would think of just hundreds of the supernatural at his fingertips, but as you begin to walk through your Old Testament just with him alone, we don't really hear of him much specifically until we get to the last chapter of your Old Testament, the book of Malachi 4 when addressing prophetically the coming Messiah whom we know as Jesus Christ. There are two characters in your Old Testament that are mentioned in the last chapter: Moses and Elijah.

Four hundred years pass and we come to the New Testament and we have a man show up on the scene by the name of John the Baptist. It is not accidental how he was dressed and how he was eating. The very fact that he was girded about with leather and eating locusts and honey, he was living exactly as Elijah did. Elijah was known as the prophet who was dressed such as that. In fact, so much so that in Matthew 11:14, Jesus makes this statement, he says, "If you receive me, then Elijah has come."

You know, today even in a modern-day Jewish Passover feast, which by the way is just around the corner, those dedicated Jewish families and even those nominal Jewish families, they will gather together their family around the table and they will always leave an empty space and at some point in the meal, typically they have one of the youngest children who is capable, they ask them to depart from the table, to go and open the door and see if Elijah has come. Why? Because Malachi 4 said he would.

Now in our context of Bible believing Christians, we know that John the Baptist, even though he was much in the spirit of Elijah, did as a whole humanity receive Jesus at his first coming? Absolutely not. In fact, these same men said may he, Jesus', blood be on them and their children for subsequent generations. By the time you get to Matthew 17, right around the corner from the crucifixion event, Jesus takes Peter, James and John up on the Mount of Transfiguration and it says there he is transformed before them, his raiment is as bright as the sun, and you guessed it, who's there with him? Moses and Elijah, the same two individuals that Malachi 4 speaks of. What's also interesting about that passage is this: that Peter, James and John don't have to ask Jesus who's with him. They knew who they were.

As you begin to make your way through the New Testament, you discover that in the book of Revelation 11, there's these two witnesses that show up and there's a lot of dispute of who they may or may not be but what's interesting in that chapter of Scripture, it says they have the power to stop the rain from heaven. Who is that that did that in the Old Testament? Elijah. It also says they have the power to turn the water into blood and to bring about the plagues, who was Moses.

And so we see the character of Elijah all through the biblical record and yet he was a mighty prophet of God but what we see are eight miracles at his hand. I want to walk through these very briefly. We're gonna put them on the screen because if you haven't read them, it might be interesting to see what the miracles actually were.

The first one, of course, is to shut up the heavens and cause a drought. That was to get the king of Israel's attention and obviously the Baal worshippers.

Then he multiplied the flour and the oil for a widow. Remember that famous story where she says, "My son and I are gonna have one last meal and then we're gonna die"? He says, "Make the cake. Give it to me and you will live." She does and the oil continues, the flour continues.

That son, though, soon thereafter would pass away and whom we know as Elijah would go upstairs and he would spread himself on his body and three times declare him to, and he would raise from the dead.

His fourth miracle was what we probably know him best for, is when he defeated the Baal worshipers on Mount Carmel, when he called fire down from heaven, not only fire to consume that the Baal worshipers could not, but he basically said, "Douse it with water just so that you know I'm not faking it."

After that, the drought was brought to an end. Remember he tells Ahab, "Do you not hear the thunder? Do you not see the clouds that are coming?"

It's miracle 6 and 7 that's real interesting in his life, for those that are come, they send a captain with 50 men and they're questioning his authority, they're questioning basically his office of prophet, and it says he calls down fire and lightning from heaven and he destroys them. By the way, when you get to Revelation 11, do you remember what the two witnesses do to their enemies? They breathe fire upon them. And because humanity has a difficult time learning, they sent another 50 and a captain and, yes, they were destroyed as well.

Last but not least, upon his departure he put his mantle into the water and he parted what we know as the Jordan River.

Eight miracles that not only took place in 1 & 2 Kings but also picture a lot of what will happen even in the end times in the book of Revelation. That's the precedence that we have, that we have a man by the name of Elijah who, by the instruction of God, has done a mighty work on behalf of God. When you get to 2 Kings 3, though, this is Elisha. This is the understudy. This was the one who sat at his feet. This was the one who learned from him and I want you to see an incredible promise that God gives him.

Go back to chapter 2 in 2 Kings, verses 8 through 10. This is one of my favorite stories in the Bible. I want you to think about what's happening here. Elijah, the great prophet, is about to be taken up. He is about to be removed from his influence of humanity. Elisha, who by the way if you read the verses prior to, everybody told him, "There's no use, go away." He said, "I'm not leaving Elijah. I'm not gonna leave him. I'll stick with him to the bitter end." They said, "But the Lord's gonna take him." He said, "It doesn't matter. I'm gonna stick with him." And when we get to verse 8 it says, "And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground." That's his final miracle. Verse 9, "And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." Now I don't know if you understand how much faith that is. How many miracles had Elisha done up to this point? None. How many times had he raised somebody from the dead? None. How many times has he parted the waters? None. How many Baal worshipers has he defeated? None. And yet he says, "I want twice in my life what God did in yours." I love Elijah's response in verse 10, he says, "You have

asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so."

I know it should come as no surprise to you that if he asked for a double portion and he saw Elijah taken up, then as the Scripture is spoken it will come to pass. Can you guess how many miracles were done at the hand of Elisha? Sixteen. In fact, we've got them listed on the screen for you, and as you begin to walk through these miracles that the Lord did through Elisha, he also parts the waters of Jordan, then he purifies the water. Miracle #3 is one of those stories in the Bible that you read it and go, "Did that really happen the way it said it did?" There are a group of, I guess, students or teenagers, young men the Bible says, who come up to him and they make fun of him for being bald-headed, so he summons a bear to eat them all. You just can't make that stuff up, folks. You just can't. I mean, that's one of those great stories and so be careful what you say about people who are follically challenged. Number 4 is the flood that we read about here in 2 Kings 3, but you'll notice as you walk through the miracles the Lord did through Elisha's life, they're very similar to Elijah. There's the raising of the dead. There's the dealing with the waters. There's even an ax-head that floats and miraculously comes back to the stick that it was there upon.

So you see a similarity but you see what God promised or what he asked to be promised come to absolute fruition. Elijah had the privilege of performing eight miracles, and Elisha had the privilege of 16. But it's this fourth one tonight that I want to focus upon because the proposition that Elisha gives is most unique, "Start digging ditches." Now if you were to hear that in your own life, as alluded to earlier, it just doesn't seem supernatural, it just doesn't seem miraculous, in fact, I would dare say that at least 30 if not 45 minutes into digging ditches, you'd begin to ask the question, "Why am I doing this? Why did God ask me to do this? And what surely can come of this?"

You know, oftentimes we don't realize that it is the basic things of life that God is trying to use in our life to bring about the supernatural. I have a friend of mine who also is in ministry and one day years ago, he had a benevolence case come to his office and, by the way, we see this each and every day of our life here at First Baptist and we're privileged because of your giving on the first Sunday of the month to meet those physical needs so that we can have spiritual conversations with them. But in this case, this friend of mine, they weren't doing as well maybe financially as they hoped they were. It was kind of during a down time of the economy, and so rather than just simply assisting as we often do, this friend who, you know, kind of has a little bit of a different approach on things, decided that when men come up asking for assistance, they had a big field in the back, he was gonna pay them a certain amount per hour to start digging holes. You know how long those guys dug holes? About 30 minutes. It's interesting, they weren't as interested in the finances anymore and time after time after time, guys would come, grab a shovel, go out back, and with an hour or so they'd quit. They weren't interested in making money.

They weren't interested in working until one guy came by, one guy came by and he said, "Man, I need the work. I want to work. Give me the shovel." He went out back, hadn't heard from him for a while, thought something had gone away, maybe he just had taken

off, right, like the others had. He went back there and he was halfway to China. I mean, he was going. This guy had been digging all the way to what you and I would call the lunch break. He said, "Man, take a break. Take a break." He said, "Can I come back?" He said, "Sure." So that guy spent eight hours digging a hole that day. My friend gave him the financial resources as he promised. He said, "Can I come back tomorrow?" He said, "Sure." So guess what he did the next day? He had him fill in the hole that he had dug. He came back the third day, he said, "Okay, dig another hole." He dug another hole. Fourth day he said, "Fill in the hole." This cycle continued, this guy had the greatest spirit, the greatest attitude. Did you know that sometime later they actually hired him on the maintenance staff of that church because of his work ethic. Just because he was willing to dig a hole.

You had a guy who was not employed. You had a guy who was struggling just to pay the basic bills of life and God used digging a hole to bring about the miraculous in his life. I promise you, he never thought that when he started digging a hole it would mean gainful employment. I promise he never thought by filling in the hole, that one day he would actually have a position at that place to come to every day, and by the way, not have to be digging holes.

Start digging ditches. It just seems so mundane. You know, I don't know if the Lord would have you actually literally dig ditches, but can I share from someone who has dug a ditch, it's not fun. There is nothing in my fiber of being that gets excited about digging a ditch. Nothing. So transpose those emotions on what your ditch is. What is digging ditches to you? When the Lord says, "I need you to do this. I'd like you to do that." Oftentimes it may mean hours of something that is not physically pleasing or fleshly pleasing in your life. What is digging ditches for you? I promise you there was nothing about the Israelites who got excited about this opportunity but what we see here is the incredible providence of God.

When you pick up the story in verse 17, notice what it says, "You shall not see the wind and you shall not see the rain, yet the valley shall be filled with water that you may drink, both you and your cattle and your beasts." Now not only did they have an issue with famine and water that they needed resolved, but unlike the miracle of Elijah, remember when he's coming down from Mount Carmel, he tells Ahab, "Do you see the clouds? Do you hear the thunder?" What does God say? "You're not going to see the clouds. You're not going to see the rain. You're not going to see the wind." So here's what God has told them, "Start digging ditches. Do that which you don't want to do and I promise you that water is gonna fill them up." It kind of reminds you of Noah, does it not? You know, Noah built a boat for 120 years and God said, "It's going to rain." He had never seen rain. It never sprinkled. He never saw a cloud. I don't know about you, but what year would you have wanted to give up? Year two? A hundred and twenty years.

Now I'm just gonna speculate. I don't know Noah, one day hopefully we'll have a nice conversation, but I bet some point around year 74 or 75, he had a serious conversation with God and said, "God, are you serious? I've been doing this 75 years." Do you know what God said? "Build the boat." I guarantee these Israelites were doing, "We've been

digging ditches all day." The second day, the third day. Do you know what God said? "Dig the ditch." How many times in our lives we don't like when God says that, do we? We don't like when he says, "Build the boat." We don't like when he says, "Dig the ditch."

He said, "You're not gonna see the clouds. You're not gonna see the rain. The valley will be filled with water and you may drink." I want you to go fast forward to verse 20, "And it came to pass in the morning, when the meat offering was offered, that, behold, there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water." I want to talk about the providence of God. Now that's one of those words that at times can scare us, particularly Baptists, but what providence really means is that God is working behind the scenes unbeknownst to you. You know that God has the right to not fill you in on all the details, right? God asked them to dig ditches, I promise you they were asking, "What for? Why? How? And when?" He said, "Don't worry about it. I got it." When they didn't see the clouds, when they didn't hear the thunder but God said water would fill. If you read the history of Josephus, he says that Edom was about a three day journey away from this particular place, and as you read the story, what you discover is that up in Edom the waters had poured down. Out of sight from the Moabites. They wouldn't have been able to hear the thunder, they wouldn't have been able to see the clouds. There would have been some type of storm or flooding or some source of abundance and as those rivers began to overflow their banks, where would they come? Naturally or shall we say supernaturally they would have made their way down to where the Israelites were and as that water came down, not only did it provide for the cattle, not only did it provide for their nourishment, but it filled the holes with water.

You see, one of the issues that we have with digging ditches in life is that we don't want to wait three days. We don't realize that three days from now God is doing something somewhere else that these two items are gonna come together and manifest themselves. How often can you look back or I've looked back on my life, and when I've had a situation take place where all the pieces came together, oftentimes I say, "I had no idea that's how God was going to work it out." They didn't know how it was gonna happen, they just simply dug the ditches, the water flowed and it filled them to the top.

The enemy was around the corner. This is what I love about this story, that the Israelites actually defeat their enemy because their enemy thought something that was not so. They wake up one day and they look and there's red liquid everywhere. The sun had risen, I'm sure because of the way things would have appeared on the reflection of the water, it was red. What did they assume? Blood. It makes perfect sense, right? They didn't hear any thunder. They didn't see any clouds. Surely the kings have been slain.

I love what it says at the end of this passage, they said, "Let's go the spoil." Now if you're going to fight, you do it very differently than if you're going for the spoil. Why? You go to fight with a sword. You go to spoil with a bag. You're there to collect things, are you not? So that means that they showed up to the Israelites camp, they're hiding around the mountains, they had no weapon to defend themselves at all. Again, what do we see God

doing in the lives of his people? Defending them and fighting on their behalf without even their own abilities being tested.

It's an incredible story of how God provided water from three days away to fill holes that would be seen by the sunlight as blood, and their enemies wouldn't even bring a sword to the fight, and yet it all hinged on digging a ditch. And so I want to ask a very simple rhetorical question: what would it have looked like if they hadn't dug the ditch? Been a mess, wouldn't it? What would it have looked like if they hadn't dug the ditch? The Moabites would have come in with swords drawn, the cattle and all of those that were there would have been thirsty as could be. God provided for them supernaturally as a result of their simple obedience in the basic things of life.

You know, one of my favorite verses in the New Testament is found in Colossians 3, it says, "Let everything be done as unto the Lord." I think sometimes we over-spiritualize that and say, "We need to sing unto the Lord. We need to preach unto the Lord." Can I be honest with you? We need to do everything as unto the Lord. We need to eat as unto the Lord. We need to write reports as unto the Lord. We need to do the whatever as unto the Lord. Why? Because what we see in our lives every day in our lives is what the Israelites saw, if we will do what God's called us to do with an absolute reckless just obedience, then you don't know where the waters are coming from and you don't know what he's gonna do with the waters when they get there, and you have no idea how he's going to use that which you saw as mundane and boring and a waste of your time to do the supernatural in your life.

The reason I love this passage, in closing, is this: when we think of the miracles of God and the supernatural outpouring of God, we think of Pentecost, we think of Mount Carmel, we think of the Mount of Transfiguration, we rarely think about digging ditches but in this story it was the digging of ditches with an absolute faithfulness that allowed the Lord to move mightily in their lives. What's the enemy gonna do in your life tomorrow? As you begin to do just the mundane things of life as unto the Lord, he's gonna say, "That's a waste of time. What are you doing that for? You're better than that. You're worth more than that. Surely your skillset could be used better than that." And what do you do? You begin to say, "Well, maybe," and you begin to rationalize and justify. Can I encourage you tomorrow whether literally or figuratively, just dig the ditches that God asked you to dig and see how he might move in your lives.