

## A Tale of Three Hearts

(2 Kings 3:1-13)

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I preached this sermon, the sixth in our sermon series on “God, Israel, and Elisha,” at GGCF, Maxwell Hotel, Escario, Cebu City last Sunday, March 13, 2011.

As we study 2 Kings, keep in mind the purpose of 2 Kings. The writer of 2 Kings wrote this book to teach Israel the blessing of honoring Yahweh and the curse of dishonoring him.

One lesson we learn is that when you honor God, God in turn honors you. God gives you His full attention and care. God works with you and for you. But if you dishonor God, God condemns you.

That’s what we have here in chapter three, wherein we read a “Tale of Three Hearts”—a story of the hearts of two Kings and one prophet of God. The writer introduces Jehoram as king over the northern kingdom of Israel. His father was the wicked Ahab, who ruled with his more wicked wife, Jezebel, for twenty-two years. When Ahab died in battle, his son, Ahaziah, took his place. But Ahaziah ruled for only two years, having died in a fall from the palace balcony in Samaria (cf. 2 Ki. 1:2-18). So Jehoram took over power upon his brother’s death (cf. 2 Ki. 3:1).

We learn three spiritual lessons about one’s relationship with God—about our thoughts and actions that draw divine decisions—in the lives of King Jehoram, King Jehoshaphat, and the prophet Elisha. We shall look into the first two kinds of hearts today; and then the third kind of heart next Sunday.

### A Divided Heart Draws the Condemnation of God

The writer of 2 Kings is no smooth-talking journalist or politician. He wrote it like it is. In that he condemns Jehoram, and his words are inspired of God, God thus condemns Jehoram, for the evil that he did “*in the sight of the LORD*” (2 Ki. 3:2, ESV).

The writer seems to employ a chiasmic parallelism in vv. 2-3. Hebrew literary works often use parallelism, wherein the second line explains or expands on the first line. But in this case, it is “chiasmic,” based on a chiasm or X-shape literary structure of vv. 2-3.

A - “*He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord,*  
B - *though not like his father and mother,*  
B1 - *for he put away the pillar of Baal that his father had made.*  
A1 - *Nevertheless, he clung to the sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat,*  
*which he made Israel to sin; he did not depart from it.”*

Notice that the writer tells about the evil of Jehoram in A, which he repeats in a parallel line in A1. Then he writes about the good of Jehoram in B, which he explains in B1.

How does he paint Jehoram here? He is painting Jehoram here as neither good or bad. Jehoram was bad, but not as worse as Ahab and Jezebel. He was good in putting away the pillar of Baal. But he was bad in clinging to the sin of Jeroboam.

Jehoram probably clung to calf-worship because it served his political interests well, just as it did with Jeroboam. If so, we see here how political power is more important to Jehoram than obedience to Yahweh. Jehoram therefore was neither godly nor godless. In other words, his heart was neither hot nor cold for God. His heart was not whole, but divided. He had a divided heart, a divided loyalty.

He is like some Pastors who do not take a stand on certain issues. Confronted with controversial issues, they would take neither side, but opt for neutrality.

Russell Dilday tells the story of such a man during the civil war between the States in America. The Northern army wore blue uniforms. The Southern army wore gray. He had many friends in the North and the South. He refused to take the side of the North or the South.

So he came out wearing a uniform with a blue jacket and gray pants. Eventually, he got shot on the upper blue part and the lower gray part of his uniform! The blue army shot his gray pants. The gray army shot at his blue jacket.<sup>1</sup>

What was the sin of Jeroboam? The sin of King Jeroboam was the establishment of calf-worship—one calf of gold in Dan and one in Bethel. Have you heard of the expression, “holy cow!”? That’s what King Jeroboam did. He set up holy cow worship in two cities in Israel.

Jeroboam was the first king of the ten tribes of Israel. Jeroboam did not want the people to go to Jerusalem in the southern kingdom of Judah, to worship in the temple there. He was afraid that the tribes might shift their allegiance to the house of David and put him out of the picture. So he set up calf-worship in the temples of Dan and Bethel. He also installed fake priests who were not Levites, and built temples on high places (cf. 1 Ki. 12:26-33). That was the sin of Jeroboam.

So why does God condemn this King Jehoram, the son of Ahab? Because even though he put away the pillar of Baal in Israel, he still “clung” to the worship of false gods. He did not totally and wholeheartedly obey God’s command against idolatry. He had a divided heart and a double mind. With a divided heart, his heart is half-devoted to eradicating Baal worship, but half-devoted also to calf-worship.

But God condemns half-heartedness. The people of Israel have long worshiped Yahweh but followed Baal also. As they gathered on Mt. Carmel together with the 450 prophets of Baal, Elijah challenged them with these words, “*How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him*” (1 Ki. 18:21, ESV).

Jesus said, “*No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money*” (Matt. 6:24, ESV). Jesus warned the church at Laodicea, “*I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth*” (Rev. 3:15, ESV). Moses said, “*And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul*” (Deut. 10:12-13, ESV).

God seeks the wholehearted worship of His people. The first commandment says, “*I am the LORD your God. You shall not have no other gods before me.*” God seeks an all-or-nothing worship. Either you worship Him with all your mind, heart, and soul, or you don’t worship Him at all. To worship other gods is idolatry. To worship the one true God, while worshipping other gods, is still idolatry. Idolatry is the worship of the one true God, while worshipping other gods. Either you worship God wholeheartedly, totally, and absolutely, or you don’t really worship Him at all.

God sees Jehoram’s heart and sends a divine trial. That divine test took the form of a serious rebellion from Mesha, king of Moab.

### **A Sensitive Heart Draws the Attention of God**

Doubtless, Yahweh sovereignly ordained the rebellion of the Moabites to draw Jehoram and Jehoshaphat together. Jehoshaphat was king of the southern kingdom of Judah. Yahweh brought these two together for a divine reason.

The Moabites had long been subjugated by Israel since the time of David, paying an annual tax of 100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams (v. 4). In vv. 4-8, we read that the Moabites under King Mesha rebelled and reinforced their cities on her northern border with Israel. (If you look at the map at the back of your Bible, you will find that Moab is located just east of the Dead Sea.)

But really, the rebellion of Moab was Yahweh’s way of bringing the godly Jehoshaphat and the lukewarm Jehoram together, so that Jehoshaphat could influence Jehoram to seek the LORD. As we shall see later, God brought them to a point of helplessness, so that they have no choice but to seek the word of the LORD from his prophet, Elisha.

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<sup>1</sup> Russell Dilday, *1,2 Kings* (PCS 9; ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 260.

And so Jehoram sent word to Jehoshaphat asking him for help in suppressing the rebellion. Jehoshaphat said yes, he will help. He asked Jehoram his battle plans. Jehoram replies that they will march through Edom (v. 8).

There are only two ways to invade Moab—from the north above the Dead Sea, which is shorter and harder, or from the south below the Dead Sea, which is longer and easier. Most of Mesha's military forces are concentrated in the north.

So in a spark of brilliance, Jehoram thought that they should launch a surprise attack at the Moabites from the south. This way, the Edomites from the south would be forced to march with them. If they attack from the north, the Edomites might be tempted to join the Moabites and fight against them.<sup>2</sup> So it seemed to be the right strategy from a military standpoint.

But from God's standpoint, man makes his plans, but it is God who executes God's plans. And it is in the plan of God to teach Jehoram and Jehoshaphat a hard lesson of faith and faithfulness to Yahweh, through His prophet, Elisha.

Sometimes, we don't understand why we have this disease or why our kids are problematic, or you're or why there are problems in your marriage. But these trials can be God's way of catching your attention, or teaching you something that you wouldn't learn without those troubles.

What happened next was that they marched in a circle. (READ v. 9) The words, "circuitous march" is just one word in the Hebrew—*sabab*—which means, "make a round, circuit" (BDB); or "roam around; wander around" (Holladay). They were practically marching around going nowhere. Worse, there was no more water for the army and animals. What seemed to be a brilliant military plan turned into a military disaster!

I can't help but ask, "*Isn't this what happens when we go about our plans without consulting the Lord first?*" Jehoram and Jehoshaphat went ahead with their plans without asking guidance from the Lord. We also go ahead with our plans without consulting God. And then when all else fails, we remember God.

I've said it before and I will say it again—God is not your "heavenly waiter" when all else fails. God is God, creator of heaven and earth, and sovereign over the universe. You had better fall down and worship Him, acknowledging your utter helplessness, than treat Him like some heavenly waiter whom you expect to help you when all else fails.

Don't treat God like a heavenly waiter or some push-button God when all else fails. Rather, before you do something, call on God.

How did Jehoram react? (READ v. 10) This is a pathetic reaction coming from a faithless person. He recognized the sovereignty of God alright. But he makes a faithless conclusion—that God shall deliver them to the Moabites in defeat and destruction. Those who have no intention to know the will of God, and who have no desire for the glory of God, will always have an excuse to blame God for their calamity.

But there is a paradox here. We don't consult God before we do something. When we fail, we remember God. When we remember God, we realize that God had ordained our failure, our point of helplessness, so that we will find our direction and strength in Him, and then glorify Him.

At their point of helplessness, Jehoram feels hopeless. But Jehoshaphat puts his hope in God. So he asked the important question in v. 11 (READ).

Jehoram looks at the divine test as divine destruction. But Jehoshaphat looks at the divine test as divine instruction. He considers the divine trial as an occasion of divine correction and an opportunity of divine intervention.

Here's a good question for all of us today. "*Is there no prophet of the Lord that we may ask the Lord?*" The prophet of the Lord carries the word of the Lord. Jehoshaphat is really asking for the word of the Lord through the prophet of the Lord. Jehoshaphat is asking for the word of the Lord that will correct them and guide them through their disaster. Oh, how we badly need the word of the Lord in everything!

But we have the complete word of the Lord in the Bible! The Bible is to us today what the prophet was to Israel then. We need the correction and instruction of God in the Bible!

Go back with me to v. 12. (READ) Somebody answered King Jehoshaphat that Elisha is here. But Elisha was not there by accident. The LORD put him there at the right time and place. He is there for a divine purpose, which is to display the grace of God to Israel and the glory of God to Moab. At this time, not so many

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<sup>2</sup> Dilday, *1,2 Kings*, 261.

people knew about the prophet Elisha, including the Kings. But he was known as the servant of the prophet, Elijah. Jehoshaphat concluded that, "*the word of the Lord is with him.*"

Jehoshaphat was sensitive to God. He wanted to meet the prophet of the Lord. He wanted to know the word of the Lord. He wanted to know the will of the Lord. He wanted to see the gracious intervention of the Lord. This is what I mean by a sensitive heart.

Let me ask you, "Is your heart sensitive to the Lord today?" "Is your heart seeking the wisdom of the Spirit today?" "Are you hungry for the word of the Lord?" "Do you seek the will of the Lord?" "Do you expect to see the intervention of God in your situation?"

If you answer yes, then you shall get God's attention. You might ask, "*Pastor, what do you mean about that?*" Look with me for the last time at v. 14. (READ) Did you read that?

Elisha detested the faithlessness of King Jehoram that he didn't want to face him. It seems as if Elisha was telling Jehoram, "King Jehoram, you don't even trust and obey Yahweh. You go about your plans and when all else fails, you blame Yahweh for it? What then has Yahweh got to do with you? As Yahweh has nothing to do with you, then I also have nothing to do with you."

But Elisha appreciated the faith of Jehoshaphat. How else did Jehoshaphat get God's attention? 2 Chron. 17:3-5 says, "*The Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the earlier ways of his father David. He did not seek the Baals, but sought the God of his father and walked in his commandments, and not according to the practices of Israel. Therefore the Lord established the kingdom in his hand.*"

Brethren, God gives His full attention to people who seek Him and trust Him! Hebrews 11 says, "*God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him*" (KJV). God looks out for people who are sensitive to God. God looks for people who hunger for God. God looks for people who seek the will of God.

### **Conclusion**

A divided heart draws the judgment of God. But a sensitive heart draws the complete attention, answers, and rewards of God. If you hunger for God, if you seek the word of God, if you seek the will of God, God shall give Himself to you.

Ask God today to give you a heart that hungers for God and you will find God.