

Let’s begin this morning by highlighting a section of our Scripture reading. It is Elijah’s successor, Elisha, who is speaking to Joram, the king of Israel, son of Ahab: *14 Elisha said, “As surely as the LORD Almighty lives, whom I serve, if I did not have respect for the presence of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, I would not pay any attention to you. 15 But now bring me a harpist.” While the harpist was playing, the hand of the LORD came on Elisha 16 and he said, “This is what the LORD says: I will fill this valley with pools of water.* (NIV)

Now, let me posit a question that I have been pondering for months: What stands in the way of us really doing “greater things” in Jesus’ name and by his power? I wonder if any of you remember the Scripture from which I preached on the Day of Pentecost/Confirmation Sunday, May 23rd? That Scripture was from the 14th chapter of John, which says in verse 12: *“Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.”*

In so many ways we struggle with doing “greater things” because we fail to believe enough to *pray for* and then *trust in* the Lord’s promises. I like how George Barna, an insightful cultural analyst, puts it in his book, *Maximum Faith*. He writes, and I quote: *“We read about the promises of God, but don’t experience their fulfillment. We participate in the institutional church, but find it less meaningful and satisfying than expected. We read the Bible, but generally lack a true understanding of the text, miss its richness and misinterpret its counsel. We vacillate between the letter and the spirit of the Law and receive the hope of neither. We take solace in being religious but overlook the value of true spirituality.”*

I often wonder why this is. Let’s be totally honest: we put our faith in so many lesser things. There is our faith in a retirement fund, a pension fund, or the market value of our homes. Some believe if we drag our kids to church that is enough to somehow insure them and us that they won’t go crazy when they hit their teens. No such insurance exists. Don’t get me wrong...truthfully, I’m in favor of “dragging” our kids to church. Consider that we put our faith in traffic lights to stop the traffic. We put our faith in the government to protect us; and that the water we drink will not harm us. However, all these things have a human component. The Scripture shouts an alternative to putting our faith in things that

are truthfully not deserving of our faith. Proverbs 3:5 says, *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”*

Our humanness often gets in the way of God doing “greater things” in and through us because we don’t really trust in God. We’ve seen the problem and it is us. To better understand how we can do “greater things,” we have been looking at two well-known Old Testament prophets—Elijah and Elisha. Today we’re deep into a good story where the kings of Israel and Judah and Edom join forces and go to war with Moab. They go by way of the desert of Edom. After traveling a great distance and the men are tired, hungry and very thirsty. If they don’t get water quickly the troops and the beasts of burden won’t be much of a force to reckon with. So, Jehoshaphat asks a pertinent question in verse 11: *“Is there no prophet of the LORD here, through whom we may inquire of the LORD?”* That is to say, who do we go to if we are to hear the Word of the Lord? An officer of King Joram points out: *“Elisha son of Shaphat is here.”* King Jehoshaphat adds: *“The word of the LORD is with him.”* (Aha!)

So the three kings go down to Elisha. After Elisha requests some musical inspiration, the hand of the LORD came upon the prophet. Elisha would have had nothing to do with Joram except that he had respect for Jehoshaphat who was known for *“doing right in the eyes of the Lord”* (1 Kings 22:43). He seeks God’s guidance for their armies. As recruits in the army of God, we ask God to similarly give us eyes to see the truth, ears to hear in a way that awakens our hearts, and hearts that pump God’s Spirit through us in new ways.

What answer does the *Bringer of God’s Word* give to the kings? *14 Elisha said, “As surely as the LORD Almighty lives, whom I serve, if I did not have respect for the presence of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, I would not pay any attention to you. 15 But now bring me a harpist.” While the harpist was playing, the hand of the LORD came on Elisha 16 and he said, “This is what the LORD says: I will fill this valley with pools of water.* (NIV)

Of course, we know the rest of the story. The water comes. The armies and the animals are quenched. The troops go on to victory. However, for many of us we never have seen God work in this sort of way because our overly analytical minds reason away the power of God in the course of our lives. As such, when we are called to move ahead in faith, we fail, not because God doesn’t want to bless us, but because we either never begin, or in our minds we limit what God can do.

If it were not for our love for the underdog almost no “greater things” would ever happen. We do long for the underrated team to win the football game, the basketball tournament, or

any competition. I think that may be why people watch shows like America's Got Talent, American Idol or The Voice. We love to hear the story of the improbable and then see an unexpected winner emerge. [Slide: Susan Boyle Picture]

Do you remember Susan Boyle, the 48-year-old Scottish cat lady in sensible shoes who believed God had given her a gift in her voice and decided to refine it wherever she could? She sang Karaoke at the opening of festivals around Europe hoping to get noticed. And then one day in Glasgow, she tried out for Britain's Got Talent. In 2009 she sang the song, "I Dreamed a Dream" and became a musical sensation with over 100 million people viewing her performance on YouTube. Since then, she has produced three albums and performed for people all over the globe.

Let's pause just a moment to remember how underdog Elisha got into the prophet business. In 1 Kings 19:19-21 we read: *So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. "Let me kiss my father and mother goodbye," he said, "and then I will come with you." "Go back," Elijah replied. "What have I done to you?" So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his servant.*

There are two main reasons we fail after burning our plows and throwing a barbeque for the neighbors in order to follow Jesus: 1. We don't *keep* God at the forefront of our thinking. 2. We don't *prepare* for the work God has for us. A helpful motto here might be, "Think big, but start small," like Susan Boyle. We have to be truthful and practical as we faithfully work to make God's vision for us a reality. We need to be prepared for the miracle God can do, and work with the resources we are given.

I can't forget my high school Phys. Ed. Teacher, Neal Lineman, (who was also the wrestling coach) who echoed a saying that I believe originated with Coach Vince Lombardi, who said: "It's not the will to be a champion that makes a champion, but the will to *prepare* to be one that matters."

Imagine the story in 2 Kings 3 if the army decided to practice *meditating* on keeping hydrated; or had someone lead the army in guided exercises to help them *visualize* the water they needed. If our plans are not from God, and grounded in reality, they won't work. God does not usually suspend the laws of physics to accomplish his will. I have

always appreciated the pragmatism of the Apostle James in his epistle: *What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead* (James 2:14-17).

If we *prepare*, we can have an impact. What practical things can we do to move closer to doing the “greater things” Jesus talked about? We can begin by living out God’s vision for accomplishing his purposes through:

1. Greater Devotion: Practice healthy spiritual disciplines like Scripture reading and memorization, prayer, fasting, worship, service, giving. Identify whether or not we have done all we can to create a sacred place for God to reside in us.
2. Greater Connectedness: In our relationships, speak affirming words to build one another up with constructive life-giving language and lifestyles. Identify how we can do that.
3. Greater Generosity: Start using our money in God-honoring ways that will have a financial impact for the work of God’s kingdom. Pay down debt and hesitate to take on more debt. Live within godly and healthy boundaries. Identify how our financial situation can get better and make small steps toward generosity.

This might not be exactly what Elisha had in mind as the *Bringer of God’s Word*, but I have a proposal that should be helpful to remember. It’s a simple equation if we hope to do the “greater things” that Jesus said we would do:

Trust in the Lord + Preparation = Greater things. Let me repeat...

Trust in the Lord + Preparation = Greater things.

That’s not from Elisha the prophet—it’s from Coach Karl. 😊

Not rocket science, but I think it can work. Glory to God! Amen.