

Two very unusual stories we might be tempted to ignore are found in 2 Kings 13. If we were to ignore them, important messages would be missed. Jehoash, a young, idolatrous king of Israel, went to visit the dying prophet Elisha. This might suggest he had some redeemable qualities—perhaps there was hope for Israel. Elisha asks the king to shoot an arrow out the window. Jehoash complies and the prophet shouts, “*The Lord’s arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Aram!*” Elisha then asks Jehoash to take his arrows and “*Strike the ground*” meaning not to literally hit the ground, but rather to empty his quiver of arrows. The king complies but he stops short and the prophet expresses frustration and anger. Are you a three-arrow Christian? Do you stop short in prayer? In faith? In witness? Or do you allow God to offer his unmeasurable gifts and power?

Back in chapter 2 Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind and does not die—God conquers death by transporting him directly to heaven! Elisha saw this take place. The brief story of Elisha’s death is told here in chapter 13. He dies of an illness and is buried. An accidental encounter of a dead man with Elisha’s bones causes the man to come to life! Once again God conquers death—this time through resurrection! Two prophets; two stories of death; two reasons for hope.

Aren’t these both unusual stories? Perhaps hard to believe stories. Well then, let me tell you a third unusual story. A farmer was paid a visit by a cousin from the city. Before dinner the farmer bowed his head to say grace. His sophisticated relative jeered, “This is so old-fashioned. Nobody with an education prays at the table anymore.” The farmer admitted the practice was old and admitted that there were even some on his farm who did not pray before their meals. The cousin remarked: “Well, I guess enlightenment has finally come to the farm. Who are these wise ones?” The farmer answered, “My pigs.”

Now, these stories are not about prayer per se, but about seeing our lives the way God sees them—getting a divine perspective, if you will. Before Elijah was taken to heaven, you may remember, Elisha his servant asked for a double portion of his spirit. Judging from the many miracles Elisha performed, I’d say that prayer was answered. One might then expect that Elisha would be taken to heaven in the same manner, but that was not the case. He died of a lingering illness. Elisha was not to follow his master in a whirlwind and a fiery chariot. During his suffering, his faith held fast to the promises of God. As on the heights of Dothan he had seen the encircling hosts of heaven, the fiery chariots of Israel and the horsemen, he was conscious of the presence of sympathizing angels. Having gained the

knowledge of God's providence and mercy, his faith had ripened into an abiding trust in his God, and when death called him he was ready to rest from his labors.

But there is a truly shocking miracle that happens following his death. We find a postscript to his death in an odd little story about the body of a man who is buried in Elisha's tomb. While some Israelites are preparing to bury a man nearby the tomb of Elisha, they see a band of Moabite raiders coming, so they quickly throw the man's body into Elisha's tomb. When the man's body comes into contact with Elisha's bones his body comes to life and the man stands up on his feet. The life-giving power of the God Elisha represented is demonstrated once again in this last biblical footnote to the life of the prophet.

But before the prophet died, the king of Israel, Jehoash, came to him in a panic. Once again Elisha tries to open the king's eyes of faith to the power of God. The king was panicked because he was under attack by the Arameans, and he grew terrified that he was not prepared to win the battle. The smell of defeat and disaster wafted on the winds from a distance. A pure analysis of the numbers told him that he was on the losing side of this battle. Everything that was available to him was not enough to win this war. So, in desperation the king went to Elisha for help. Even though the king was facing a physical, tangible military crisis, he needed and sought spiritual direction. We'll at least give him credit for that.

Elisha responded by telling the king to take his bow in his hands. When he did, Elisha then placed his hands on top of the king's hands. By doing so, he merged the spiritual with the physical, inviting heaven's viewpoint to come to bear on earth. Next, Elisha instructed the king to open the window that faced toward the east—where his enemy waited—and shoot an arrow out of it. When the king did, remember that Elisha said, "*The LORD's arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Aram!*" Elisha declared. "*You will completely destroy the Arameans at Aphek*" (2 Kings 13:17).

In this story we hear that Elisha gave the king a prophetic word. He gave him exactly what he needed in the midst of a crisis; and that is to see the spiritual side of the issue. Because if all we can see is the issue itself then we will inevitably see defeat. But when we are able to see what God sees, it gives us the opportunity to conduct ourselves in light of that truth. Keep in mind that it is only an opportunity, though, because God never twists our arms and forces us to have faith. If he did, it would invert the very faith he forced us to have.

After this, Elisha told the king to take his remaining arrows. And so he did. "*Strike the ground,*" (2 Kings 13:18) Elisha instructed, and the king did it. But then came the

problem. Because of the king's fear-induced self-preservation, or maybe out of haste—we don't know for sure—he did not act on the prophetic word Elisha had just given him which declared his victory. Rather, the text tells us that, *“He struck it three times and stopped”* (2 Kings 13:18). This made Elisha very angry as he rebuked him by saying, *“You should have struck the ground five or six times; then you would have defeated Aram and completely destroyed it. But now you will defeat it only three times”* (2 Kings 13:19).

Friends, the lesson for us from the decision of King Jehoash I believe is this: *Most of the time God's promises are not in our hands, but they are within our reach. God's promises don't come about by simply sitting around and waiting for them. They require us to act in faith, to live out the principles taught in his word, and to align our lives with God's word*—or as our church's mission statement says, “to be directed by God's word.”

With the first arrow that Elisha called, *“The Lord's arrow of victory,”* the promise of victory for king Jehoash was established. Yet the king was told to shoot more arrows out the window. We know that at a minimum he had at least six arrows in his quiver because of what Elisha said to him. But the king chose to shoot only three. Maybe he wanted to save his remaining arrows for the battle. Maybe he didn't want to retrieve them or lose them altogether. The king was obviously covering himself in keeping back a few of his arrows. Yet for whatever reason, the prophet gave him a clear instruction, and Jehoash held back. He quit long before he ever should have. All of us, to one degree or another, can identify with this king.

At one time or another we have found ourselves panicked—overwhelmed by circumstances and situations coming at us, with no earthly solution in sight. Have you ever experienced a time in our nation when it seems that so many people feel so helpless, afraid, and defeated? In a multitude of ways, many of us today are mirroring this king, panicked about the attacks we are facing or may soon face.

Yet many of us are quitting way too early as well. We are trying to mix “God's way” by shooting a few arrows out the window with “our way” making sure that we have enough arrows left should we need to figure it out for ourselves. Like the king, we are too afraid to empty our quiver in faith. When it comes to whether or not people will empty their quiver of arrows, few of us do.

Just like the king of Israel we want a little bit of God. And we want to hold back a little bit for us. Just in case. But God rarely drops his promises into our laps. What God makes legal through his covenant love, we must make personal. By faith we must bring its reality from

heaven to earth. We must usher in what God has promised by participating in his grand drama of salvation.

Because the king chose to use only part of what he had, he only received part of what was promised. We should not let that happen to us. The promises in Scripture are true, and his promises are complete. But rarely do these promises come to us apart from our *participation*. When I attended high school and college, I was promised a degree at the time I completed my course of study. However, it was my participation in the educational process that ushered in the reality of the promise of receiving a diploma.

If you buy a toaster and bring it home, the packaging and the marketing around that toaster promises to supply you with toasted bread. But you still must plug it in after you take it out of the box. Don't you? You still must put the bread in. Don't you? You still must push it down for it to start toasting. Don't you? There are things you must do to enjoy the promise of the toaster you purchased.

The king's problem was real. His problem was big. I know that whatever you might be facing right now is real, as well, and that it is also big. But don't quit. Don't throw in the towel. Don't let any failures of your past negate your future. God can hit a bull's eye even with a crooked arrow. When God gives you his view of things on what he would have you do, go ahead and do it. Don't merge what God says with what your friends say, or what you read on Facebook, what your kids say, or even with what you have been thinking.

The promise is already in your hands. Trust God. Obey God.

God gives life-giving power! Amen.

(Thanks to Tony Evans for sermon ideas)