

## Half-Heartedness

2Kings 3

4/7/2021 – BPC 5pm Service

I wonder if you know the story of the young man from youth group who's planning a compromising night with his girlfriend. He heads to the local chemist and explains that he needs the appropriate protection because he tells the chemist, after the family dinner he's planning on having a great time.

Surprisingly at the family dinner that night, he offers to say grace – which he does for a very long time to the point where his girlfriend leans across and says to him, I didn't realise you were so religious – to which he responds – I didn't realise your dad was a pharmacist...

I am making use of that story, funny it may be, because it highlights a reality we are familiar with, whatever you call it: religious hypocrisy, fake religion, or just half-heartedness. A confessing Christian, a church goer who has gaps or even gaping holes in their loyalty to or obedience to Jesus.

And though this is a familiar story and scene, it makes it no less sad or confronting. Because the true God revealed to us in Jesus, both deserves and demands total faithfulness. God has called us to have no other Gods, to have no idols, to love him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

And far from unfair or oppressive, this all-encompassing demand of loyalty is no burden to bear but an act of love from the God who saves and blesses. A call to know and be set free by the truth, to have life to the full, and incomparable joy.

And so why we are left to ask, why is this such a familiar story – such a familiar experience? God deserves and demands total faithfulness, which is good, great for us, but half-heartedness prevails.

Why is this the case? What are we to do with this? Well 2Kings 3 that we've just heard read not only shows us what half-heartedness looks like, but exposes the horror of its reality while also giving us a way forward that both honours God and is good for us.

As the chapter opens we meet King Joram or Johoram (ESV), the second son of Ahab after his brother Ahaziah, you may remember from chapter 1, suddenly died before having kids after falling out of his window and under God's judgement. And sadly the apple continues to fall not far from the tree!

<sup>2</sup> *He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, but not as his father and mother had done. He got rid of the sacred stone of Baal that his father had made.* <sup>3</sup> *Nevertheless he clung to the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit; he did not turn away from them.*

Joram we are told isn't as bad as his mum and dad, Ahab and Jezebel, but as we know, that's not saying much! He's not as bad as he could have been sure, but nor is he as righteous as he should be!

You can almost here the author sigh in v.3 as we are told yes he removed a sacred stone of Baal, but *nevertheless* he clung to sin and idolatry. Just because he gave up one form of idolatry does

not make him an improvement. We see this clearly in the God's own verdict: *he did evil in the eyes of the LORD*

It's like Joram's saying to God, I know you're big on loyalty so I'll give you 20%... I'll get rid of dad's Baal stone for you but that'll be it. He's half-hearted at best... And although we might not like to admit it, I think we like to view our loyalty to Jesus or our sin on a sliding scale...

We find ways to allow, excuse, even promote our half-heartedness. "I'm not as bad I was or could be and certainly much much better than he or she is."

We let ourselves be impressed by our mediocre change or consistency... To be content with only going so far because we already know more, do more, and care more than so many others.

Does your inner Pharisee run to your defence when a passage, pastor, or friend calls you out, confronting some sin? Do we thank the person who called us out or are we quick to decide that their faults mean we don't have to do anything... You tell me.

Do you have an inner legalism that comes to your aid, even allowing you to make it sound super Christian... "It's not how good I am but how good Jesus is." "I'm saved by grace not works." All beautiful truths for sure, but also easily used to allow us to drift in our half-heartedness.

So we must hear God's declaration of Joram: *he did evil in the eyes of the LORD*. And we need to grasp this reality so we won't be content with giving God anything less than all he deserves and demands and what will be so good for us.

And the half-heartedness Joram shows in vv.4-14 is sadly familiar. We meet Mesha, King of Moab, who for some time has been paying tribute to Israel in the sum of 100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams – which is a massive amount and very expensive as it sounds!

And so somewhat understandably, in v.5, he's not that keen to keep doing it and the death of Ahab proves the catalyst to rebel. King Joram is rightly not pleased with this and quickly rallies his troops in v.6 and sends word to Jehosaphat in v.7, the King of Judah to the south, asking him to join in.

Jehosaphat is very compliant, saying, *"I will go with you," he replied. "I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses."*

Now that may sound familiar because this is exactly what the King of Judah said to Ahab when he asked him to come fight Ramoth Gilead in 1Kings 22. But with one key difference: when joining Ahab, Jehosaphat first demanded that they seek a prophet to hear from the LORD (1Kings 22:5).

But sadly when joining Joram, he skips this step and goes straight to tactics. And as readers of Kings, we surely know this is a massive oversight, a failure of his duty that will only end in disaster.

So he ignores God completely and to make matters worse, Joram is a military moron. Jehosaphat asks for the plan in v.8 and Joram has the great idea of going through the desert. So they collect the King of Edom in v.9, who was under Judah's rule and a package deal with Jehosaphat it seems.

So the three kings march out into the desert, v.9, and *After a roundabout march of seven days, the army had no more water for themselves or for the animals with them.*

It's almost as if we are to picture Joram leading these armies around in circles in the desert then thinking to himself, did I forget to pack something... the water! And he's response in v.10 then is almost comical: v.10 *"What!" exclaimed the king of Israel. "Has the LORD called us three kings together only to deliver us into the hands of Moab?"*

Like many before him and even more since, Joram goes from ignoring God to then blame him when faced with disaster. It's a common human attitude. Stephen Fry is an English actor, comedian and well-known for his outspoken atheism.

When asked in an interview, if it turned out he was wrong and he stood before God, what would he say? And without hesitation he answered: "How dare you! How dare you create a world in which there is such misery that is not our fault. Why should I respect a capricious, mean-minded, stupid God who creates a world so full of injustice and pain?"

But this attitude and behaviour is not simply something that happens out there, for whether youth group or growth group or church there plenty of Jorams! People who are ok with God, happy to go along with him with minimal engagement or care, only to then blame God when things go bad.

And especially in the church, those who know enough about God only to blame him. As Ralph Davis, says, "Always be aware of those who cite the sovereignty of God in order to excuse or accuse but not worship and adore."

And so if we can see any of this tendency or attitude in ourselves, we must see how offensive and dangerous it is. As Joram accuses God it seems Jehosaphat's memory returns and finally suggests in v.11, *"Is there no prophet of the LORD here, through whom we may inquire of the LORD?"*

And it just so happens that Elisha is travelling with them – which is brought up thanks to a random officer. The three kings come to him and Elisha really skips the pleasantries: <sup>13</sup>*"Why do you want to involve me? Go to the prophets of your father and the prophets of your mother."* "No," the king of Israel answered, *"because it was the LORD who called us three kings together to deliver us into the hands of Moab."*

Elisha essentially asking him what interest he *now* has in God's Word? It was irrelevant to him before, so happy in his idolatry... Elisha holds no punches in calling him out, addressing the shameful hypocrisy of turning to God only when in need or it suits.

Joram holds his course and essentially says, it's the LORD's fault, let's hear what he has to say for himself. And Elisha's response is shocking: *"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."*

He's essentially saying that Elisha will only bring God's Word because Jehosaphat is there. And so by thinking he can treat God however he likes, Joram can and should expect nothing from God. And we actually see a very similar warning given to followers of Jesus in James 1.

<sup>5</sup> *If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.* <sup>6</sup> *But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.* <sup>7</sup> *That person should not*

*expect to receive anything from the Lord. <sup>8</sup> Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.*

The doubting that James is warning against here is not intellectual confidence or certainty that God will do what you're asking, but about loyalty – what he calls in v.8, being *double-minded* or literally to be two-souled or what we would call being two-faced. It's the half-committed, half-hearted Christian.

James warns that those who want to seek God for help but not submit their lives to him, should expect nothing. And so how do we know if this is us? Well do you see patterns of Joram in yourself?

Do you seek God only at your convenience and for your agenda?  
Are you coming to God only out of interest in escape from trouble while refusing the pathway of actually being a disciple? Do you want God's Word only for certain moments but won't submit to it in the long-term and all of life?

Has your view and treatment of God become merely an air-bag – or even punching bag? Are there patterns of Joram in you, where you are seeking to control your relationship with God rather than submit to him?

Many of you know will know of Ravi Zacharias – he spent decades travelling the world defending the Christian faith, speaking to hundreds of thousands about Jesus. Yet all the while he not only had multiple affairs and abused several women, he justified it as what he needed or deserved for all his work. Our ability to persist in and justify half-heartedness is profound and confronting.

Whether it's how you use your time or money, what you say or watch, where you let your mind drift off to or your treatment of others, is there a pattern of controlling God's demand on your life, or just content to limit your faithfulness for your own convenience.

And so if we see the pattern of Joram has or does exist in your life we must hear God's declaration that it is evil. And as we do that, the response of God to this half-hearted King not simply a comfort for our souls in desperate need of forgiveness, but also shows us the way into a deeper faithfulness.

With Elisha now before the three kings, he calls for a harpist in v.15 and as the music plays God's Word comes to him with a double promise for the King that I imagine he could barely believe.

*"This is what the LORD says: I will fill this valley with pools of water. <sup>17</sup> For this is what the LORD says: You will see neither wind nor rain, yet this valley will be filled with water, and you, your cattle and your other animals will drink.*

God will quench their thirst. Pools of water will appear though there's no forecast for rain, they won't see it coming, but it will. Their desperate disaster will be relieved by the word and provision of God.

But God isn't done. Though not asked for or even on the radar for Joram, God promises more than their immediate dilemma but future need.

*<sup>18</sup> This is an easy thing in the eyes of the LORD; he will also deliver Moab into your hands. <sup>19</sup> You will overthrow every fortified city and every major town. You will cut down every good tree, stop up all the springs, and ruin every good field with stones."*

So after being ignored and accused by Joram, God promises him both water and victory. And while big in Joram's eyes, is an easy thing for the LORD as he mercifully confronts half-heartedness by displaying his power and extravagant grace to the undeserving.

And while the promise is amazing, the fulfilment is even better as we the water God provides truly is wonderful. The water comes in v.20, as just a matter of fact. God speaks it happens.

But as this water from God covers the land, the Moabites who have heard about the 3 kings coming out to battle them, see the sun glistening off the water and they think it's blood in v.22.

And it's almost comical, they high five each other and celebrate and say to each other in v.23, *"That's blood!" they said. "Those kings must have fought and slaughtered each other. Now to the plunder, Moab!"*

And again we see the absolute power and sovereignty of God as they sprint up to enjoy the spoils of war – but all they do is run into swords and are destroyed.

And victory, as promised, is total in v.25, with towns, trees, fields, and springs destroyed. But the tone really shifts gear in v.26. Mesha, the King of Moab, sees that loss is imminent, he takes 700 swordsmen in a last ditch effort to get to the King of Edom but it fails.

And what happens next is truly shocking: *<sup>27</sup> Then he took his firstborn son, who was to succeed him as king, and offered him as a sacrifice on the city wall. The fury against Israel was great; they withdrew and returned to their own land.*

In 1868 an Anglican missionary found this, called the Mesha Stele, or Moabite stone dated to 840BC. And on it is an inscription by King Mesha himself speaking of his frustration at being subject to Israel since the time of Omri – who we meet in 1Kings 16. (it is currently on display in the French Louvre)

But Mesha ascribes this defeat to Israel to the anger of the Moabite god Chemosh. And so in the face of imminent defeat again, Mesha seeks to appease his fake god Chemosh as he kills his own son.

But in the face of this desperate, tragic, and just sad act, the final words of the chapter are quite confusing. Great fury or wrath comes upon Israel and they retreat before full and final victory.

But the key question is whose wrath is it? And it is tricky to be sure and the books were confused and divided. It could be God's, the LORD's wrath against his own people and that is the common way the words are used together in the OT. And it would be a bit of a stinger in the tail of the story that Israel do not recapture Moab and Joram is left with the choice of whether he'll cry out to God, change his ways, and flee his heartedness.

Or it could be that the wrath is Israel's – that the wrath that comes upon them is their own, their indignation, horror, and disgust as they see the idolatry of Moab in its gory detail. And seeing this, they withdraw at the sheer awfulness of it all.

Because either way, throughout this chapter we have seen Joram and Israel prone to self-reliance and idolatry. We've seen the true God intervene in mercy to provide for him beyond what he wanted, asked for, and certainly deserved, and then the chapter finishes with he and Israel walking away with a clear picture of what pagan desperation does and looks like.

And God is asking them to see and process what life is really like without him. While Mesha kills his own son to rouse his god into action, Israel has ignored and accused the only true God only to have him show up and bless him abundantly.

Why would he or Israel turn anywhere else? Why neglect this God or think you're better off giving him anything less than all your love and loyalty and worship?

And we see that's the clear point of what God has done and is doing in this chapter. Look back at v.18. As God promises Israel water to quench their thirst, God says this is a small thing for him to do. Yet their view of God is so impoverished, so small that they think it is a big deal.

And so it is our view of God that will either drive or destroy our half-heartedness. Theology fuels discipleship. Knowledge of God motivates our living for God.

So if we want to flee half-heartedness and a faithfulness that falls so far short of what Christ deserves and demands, then we must run to God and magnify him in our hearts and minds as he really is.

The root power of sin is severed by the power of a superior pleasure. The bondage to sin is broken by a stronger attraction — a more compelling joy. And so we will flee half-heartedness when we have what As Scottish preacher Thomas Chalmers called "The expulsive power of a new affection."

This is why time and time again we find in the NT, Paul praying that Christians who know Christ would know and grasp him deeper and deeper.

Listen to what Paul prays in Ephesians: <sup>17</sup> *I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.* <sup>18</sup> *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people,* <sup>19</sup> *and his incomparably great power for us who believe.*

*And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,* <sup>18</sup> *may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,* <sup>19</sup> *and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

We never need more than Christ but to know and be compelled by more of Christ! And so do you want that? Do you long to go deeper into your understanding of who Jesus is, his character, love, power, and gentleness. To go deeper into what he's done through his death and resurrection.

Because you only need to be around church or Christians for about 5 minutes to realise how easily we forget or underestimate God. To become bored or underwhelmed or just fall into habits of saying “Yeah I know God loves me and Christ died for me.”

Youth often say this about church. “I know” they say, “I get it... Jesus loves me...” as if it’s this small and insignificant thing that changes nothing while in reality it is the most beautiful, compelling, and life-changing truth that could ever be told, heard, and understood!

It’s why what we are doing now and every week in listening to God’s Word really matters – it’s why what we do at growth group or just in opening the bibles ourselves really matters as we behold our God who deals in extravagant grace and really can do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine.

We see this so clearly in 2Kings 3 don’t we? One of the tensions I hope you’ve had in this passage is why would God do this for dodgy old Joram who doesn’t ask for it and certainly doesn’t deserve it.

But that’s exactly the point. Elisha made that clear to him when he said the only reason he was speaking and giving this amazing promise was because of Jehosaphat! And so the undeserving Joram is abundantly blessed through and because of someone else!

And isn’t that exactly the same for you and I? Isn’t that what we see in the Gospel or what we just sang and are about to remember in the Lord’s Supper? That nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling? Naked come to you for dress, helpless look to you for grace, vile I to the fountain fly, wash me saviour, or I die!

As Paul says in Philippians 3, <sup>8</sup> *What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ<sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.* <sup>10</sup> *I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,* <sup>11</sup> *and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.*

So do you want to go deeper into knowing, enjoying, and living for Christ? Are you longing and praying for a big and glorious view of Jesus – because you want to see and enjoy him as he really is.

John Piper says, “The whole duty of the Christian can be summed up in this: feel, think, and act in a way that will make God look as great as he really is. Be a telescope for the world of the infinite starry wealth of the glory of God.”

And as we grasp the greatness of Jesus, we’ll see that limiting Jesus’ claim on our life or refusing to let him have all of our life, is not protecting our joy or fulfilment but losing it.

<sup>25</sup> *But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.* (James 1:25)

The true and living God we have come to know in Jesus doesn't simply demand our total love and loyalty, but is so worthy of it as he deals with us in extravagant grace, so will we, will you resist giving him anything less and flee half-heartedness as you gaze and go deeper into the glory of Christ.

Let's pray (with the words of Hebrews 12:1-3)