Faith During Faithlessness – Part 1

# Digging Ditches

## (2 Kings 3:1-16)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. We’re beginning a brand-new message series entitled “Faith During Faithfulness” and it is my prayer that God would minister to you in a special way as we look at the Old Testament prophet Elisha in the book of second Kings. I’ve been asking God to build the faith of this church, to increase our capacity for the supernatural, and so I want to encourage you to listen to this message, to hear the Word of God from the perspective of faith, and through the lens of your greatest need.

I believe it’s really important, especially as we read in the Old Testament, that we don’t just see it for its historical content, but as it actually is, the Word of God, which is at work in you who believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:13). That’s what the Spirit of God tells us, and so just because we hear the Word, read the Word, or thought about the Word, that doesn’t mean that we have fully understood it. And so, we don’t want to miss out on the depth of its riches and therefore we really want to dig down into that Word.

Today I want to talk to you about Digging Ditches, because digging is so important, and as we turn to the Word of God in second Kings, chapter 3, we’re going to discover faith during a faithless time. I hope you all brought your shovels because we want to dig down to understand the principles that God is teaching us. You see, God’s word will challenge our way of thinking so that we may understand better how to face our contemporary challenges as followers of Christ. And so, I want you to understand if you are in this building, or maybe you’re watching in your living room or kitchen, but whatever building you’re in right now, you need to understand that it began, it started with one shovel full of dirt.

It’s just a little thing, but I believe a shovel is very significant symbolically in terms of calling, new beginnings, purpose, and development. For me when I see a shovel, it represents a lot of things. When a shovel is used for its intended purpose, whether planting, landscaping, or building, just the act of moving a shovel full of dirt from one place to another can be exciting, because there is something new happening, something being planted, something being built. But for me a shovel is also symbolic of work, you know, the sweat, the stress and anxiety, the time invested in a project.

And so, I believe when it comes to our lives, our ministry, and this church as followers of Christ, we’ve just got to go a little bit deeper. Trusting the Lord who said in Isaiah,

“I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland” (Isaiah 43:19).

And it’s important for us to understand that this new thing, this outpouring of creative energy and transformation is a work of the Lord, and so when it comes down to where we’re really living, it’s often about working and digging our way out one shovel at a time.

And so, if you could turn in your Bibles to second Kings, chapter 3, I want to set the context for our study today. If you don’t have a Bible, or can’t find a Bible near you, or maybe you’re flipping your way through Ephesians looking for second Kings, don’t worry because we’ll have the Scriptures up on the screen. And so, beginning reading at verse one of second Kings, chapter 3, the Bible says,

“Joram son of Ahab became king of Israel in Samaria in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and he reigned twelve years. 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. 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” (2 Kings 3:1-3).

“Now Mesha king of Moab raised sheep, and he had to supply the king of Israel with a hundred thousand lambs and with the wool of a hundred thousand rams. But after Ahab died, the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel. So, at that time King Joram set out from Samaria and mobilized all Israel” (2 Kings 3:4-6).

I think it’s important that we remember that people change, alliances and allegiances change, and so the same people who said “Hosanna” yesterday, will say “crucify him” tomorrow. In other words, we don’t want to put too much weight on what someone said or did yesterday, because tomorrow they might change their minds.

You see, as long as King Ahab was alive everything was good between the Israelites and the Moabites, but now that Ahab had died and his son Joram had succeeded him in power, the king of Moab changed his mind. And so, the same person who was giving the king of Israel 100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams, suddenly rebels and decides he’s no longer going to give to him from the flock and from the herd.

Joram recognized that in order to handle this he needed to expand his relationships, that he was going to have to create an alliance, and so not only did he mobilize his troops, but he also sent a message to Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah saying,

“The king of Moab has rebelled against me. Will you go with me to fight against Moab?" (2 Kings 3:7a).

Jehoshaphat was very cordial and replied,

“Yes, I will go with you. I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses" (2 Kings 3:7b).

And so, we find ourselves eavesdropping on a conversation between Kings in a dark period of unfaithfulness in Israel. The king of Israel has created this alliance, this Confederation of Kings, because the Moabites have rebelled against him, threatening his authority. He recognized the value of connecting with other leaders and forming an alliance for a greater purpose. And so, that’s the context, he’s like, “Jehoshaphat, come with me” in verse eight,

“By what route shall we attack?"

Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah answered, "Through the Desert of Edom" (2 Kings 3:8).

And so, Joram says, “Okay!” And he invites the king of Edom saying, “Come on, you can join us too.” And the Bible says in verse nine that,

“The king of Israel set out with the king of Judah and the king of Edom” (2 Kings 3:9).

Now, this was an interesting alliance, because these three kings had nothing in common, they had different belief systems, they came from different people groups, but they came together because they had a common enemy. And it should have been easy, because it was three kings against one, but as it often is in life, things don’t always go as planned. You know, you think you’ve got it figured out, but things don’t turn out the way you thought they would. And that is what happens to these three kings, the Bible says,

“After a roundabout march of seven days, the army had no more water for themselves or for the animals with them” (2 Kings 3:9).

They started out through the desert of Edom, walking in this valley, which was nothing more than a dried-up riverbed, they’re seven days into their journey before they realize that they’re totally and completely out of water. They thought they were going to win this battle easily, but they found themselves in danger, because they have a very significant need. Not only are their animals going to die of thirst, but they’re about to die of thirst.

Joram, the king of Israel exclaimed,

"What! Has the Lord called us three kings together only to hand us over to Moab?" (2 Kings 3:10).

There’s always that one isn’t there? You know, that one friend that tells you, “You shouldn’t have done that, you should’ve stayed where you were, you’re not going to make it out of this.” And the king of Israel is speaking negatively about their situation, just doom and gloom, saying “we can’t do this, we never should’ve left, now we’re going to die in the desert.”

And suddenly, these three kings who are not serving God, not seeking God, begin to get spiritual because now they’re in trouble. And the good news is that when you find yourself in trouble, your greatest need will become a blessing when it drives you to depend on God. And so, Jehoshaphat does what a lot of us do when we’ve exhausted every other option. He decides that they should seek God, and so he’s the first one, he breaks the ice, and he’s going to turn the conversation into a spiritual one. In verse 11 he asked,

“Is there no prophet of the Lord here, that we may inquire of the Lord through him?" An officer of the king of Israel answered, "Elisha son of Shaphat is here. He used to pour water on the hands of Elijah." (2 Kings 3:11).

Now, Jehoshaphat had heard of Elisha, he knew that he was rookie prophet of the year, and he’d heard of the miracles that he had performed. And so, he said to the king of Israel,

“The word of the Lord is with him” (2 Kings 3:12).

The Bible says in verse 12 that,

“The king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to Elisha” (2 Kings 3:12).

They called on him and when he came to the door, when he saw Joram, he almost went back in, but he said,

“What do we have to do with each other? Go to the prophets of your father and the prophets of your mother” (2 Kings 3:13).

In other words, he’s like, what do you want from me? You’ve been ignoring God all this time, worshiping your idols, and so why don’t you just 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 hand us over to Moab" (2 Kings 3:13).

And so, suddenly Joram gets spiritual, he pulls out the God card, “It was the Lord who called us” he said. But Elisha replied, “I shouldn’t even talk to you, but because of Jehoshaphat…” He says,

"If I did not have respect for the presence of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, I would not look at you or even notice you. But now bring me a harpist” (2 Kings 3:14-15).

Elisha says, because Jehoshaphat is here, I will help you out, but if you want me to prophesy, I will need some music. He said, bring me a musician, a harpist, because he knew that when you start praising God it provokes the Spirit of God to flow. And so, they brought him a harpist and the Bible says,

“While the harpist was playing, the hand of the Lord came upon Elisha” (2 Kings 3:15).

Like water breaking in the womb of a pregnant woman, even though Elisha was a prophet of God, he still needed an anointed musician, a worship leader, to help him enter into the prophetic. And as the Living Waters began to flow, the hand of the Lord came upon Elisha, and watch what he says now,

“He said, "This is what the Lord says: Make this valley full of ditches” (2 Kings 3:16).

I believe that this is important, because a lot of us are sitting back waiting on the Lord, saying that when the Lord is ready, he’s going to make a way where there is no way. And so, we just sit here and wait on the Lord, we don’t pray about it, we don’t talk about it, we don’t invest in it or work for it, we just wait on it. But if these three kings had done what we do, if they just sat there in the desert and waited on the Lord, they would’ve died there along with their animals.

However, God was calling them to exercise their faith during a season of faithlessness, they would have to have the faith to go as far as they could go with what they had. God said, “make this valley full of ditches” because he wanted them to be invested in the miracle. And so, he called them to pick up a shovel, to work and begin to sweat it out. With every shovel full of dirt God was watching to see how far their faith would take them. They would have to work and sweat in the desert without any encouragement of any kind. In fact, the Lord said,

“You will see neither wind nor rain…” (2 Kings 3:17).

And so, there wouldn’t be any wind, no clouds or thunder, no sign at all that help was on the way.

Aren’t you glad that just because you don’t see any wind or any rain, it doesn’t mean that help isn’t on the way? The Lord said, “I’m going to send you water, but you’re not even going to see it coming.” He said,

“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” (2 Kings 3:17).

And so, there wasn’t any evidence, no physical signs, but the Lord did give them one thing, he gave them his word. He said, “make this valley full of ditches.”

I think that sometimes a great move of God depends more on us getting into the prophetic, getting ready to receive it, then it does on God be willing to give it. In other words, we need to prepare our hearts, asking God to increase our faith, to increase our capacity for the supernatural, and trusting him for…

“Immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us” (Ephesians 3:20).

And so, I wonder if there is anyone here who has set their heart on seeking God, any of you who are hungry and thirsty, who are ready to receive a blessing that you didn’t even see coming? You know, an unexpected supernatural blessing to sustain you, to enlarge you, giving you increase, and taking you to the next level?

I don’t know about you, but I am ready for it. I’m ready to invest some sweat. I’m ready to pick up a shovel, ready to dig some ditches, ready for God to surprise me, and so I’m making room for God’s provision.

As I think about my faith journey, I’ve had to pick up a shovel and dig some ditches along the way. As I was serving as an associate pastor in Fairfield, renting a church on Saturday nights, pastoring a home church, and now pastoring the church in Emmitsburg, God has had to increase my capacity for stress, for anxiety, for pressure, and for deadlines. He had to increase my capacity, because when I got here, I ran into problems that I have never experienced before, but that’s what’s so wonderful about serving a God who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.

And so, I want to encourage each one of you, because I know the ground is hard, it’s tough work, but you can do this because God wouldn’t have called you and put you in this situation if you couldn’t do it. You see, if the Lord thought enough of you to send you, the Bible says that he will,

“Equip you with all you need for doing his will” (Hebrews 13:20, NLT).

And the Lord tells these three kings, “make this valley full of ditches” and I want to encourage you to pick up a shovel and start digging. Don’t give up on what God calls you to do, because God wouldn’t have put you in that situation if he wasn’t also going to empower you and enable you to do what he called you to do. It may stretch you emotionally, physically, and financially. You may have to plan, study, and build, but you can do it. In fact, it’s been often quoted that whoever God calls, he also qualifies (Elder Thomas S Monson).

And I know that there may be some of you standing here, standing in the valley, and you are looking at that dry riverbed. You’ve never been in a place like this before, you’ve never done this before, you don’t know what you’re doing, but you recognize that there is no more water, and you’ve got to do something. And so, I want to encourage you to pick up a shovel and start digging, to invest some sweat into it, and get with somebody who does know what they’re doing. In fact, much of life is built on partnerships with others in the church, others in the community, and like these three kings we are so much better together.

The Lord Jesus said it this way in Luke chapter 14,

"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish” (Luke 14:28-30).

"Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:31-33).

I’m wondering how many of you have really counted the cost of being a disciple of Jesus? You know, what are you willing to crucify, where are you willing to change so that you can achieve what is next in your life? How long are you willing to dig before you see what God spoke realized in your life?

Jesus said, “Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33).

I want to encourage you today not to give up on your dream, don’t give up on that prophecy, and don’t give up on what God has called you to do. I know it’s tempting to take the easy way out. So many of us say, “That’s just the way I am.” But that’s exactly the kind of thinking that we’ve got to put on the cross, we’ve got to nail “That’s just the way I am” to the cross, as the apostle Paul said,

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20).

You see, many of us are okay with coming to church, we’re okay with putting Jesus on the cross, but when we start talking about putting you on the cross, suddenly you get really quiet. You were shouting “Hosanna,” but to say, “I have been crucified with Christ” and getting down in the valley and starting to dig ditches requires a lot more commitment.

The thing is, in order to get what God wants done, you’ve got to pick up a shovel, you’ve got to get rid of “That’s just the way I am” kind of thinking and start saying,

“Here am I. Send me!” (Isaiah 6:8).

In other words, “Here am I, make me who you want me to be, or what you want me to do, because I’m ready to go to the next level.” And I believe with that decision to begin digging, that little by little, we’re going to dig our way out of it.

The Lord said, “Make this valley full of ditches” because real faith believes big, but it’s willing to start small, just one shovelful at a time. And so, I hope you’ll join us next week for part two, “Faith that Works” as we see what happened with these three kings, but today as we close, let’s pray together.

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