

## SERMON – HOPE MUST HAVE A FOUNDATION (COMMITMENT)

By Ken Kreider

For January 26, 2008

*2 Kings 13: 18 Then he said, "Take the arrows"; so he took them. And he said to the king of Israel, "Strike the ground"; so he struck three times, and stopped. 19 And the man of God was angry with him, and said, "You should have struck five or six times; then you would have struck Syria till you had destroyed it! But now you will strike Syria only three times."*

When I was young, my older brother Loren and I used to get into discussions about the predestination of man. He would say, "If man is predestined, then how can anything we do have any effect on whether we are saved or lost?" And I would say, "We serve an all powerful God. He has the power to give us the power of choice while at the same time knowing what choices we are going to make." Hope must have a foundation.

The Bible says in Deuteronomy 30:19, "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Therefore choose life." For why will you die O Israel?" God has given us the power of choice, and the choices we make have far reaching results. They affect not only ourselves, but also others around us. God allowed Hezekiah to choose whether the sundial would go forward or back 10 degrees. God at various other times gave men the choice of the turn of events. David got to choose his punishment after his sin with Bathsheba. And because the Ninevites repented when Jonah came to preach to them, God decided not to punish them in forty days as originally planned. **Their punishment, they discovered, was conditional. All they needed to do was to repent. Otherwise, if repentance were not an option, what would be the point of Jonah going there in the first place?** So we see that man does play an important part in the great outcome of history. God does not desire for us to choose evil. Today I am going to show you how one man's choice to throw in the towel affected the entire nation.

Now I must give you a little background for today's message. Israel and Judah had both fallen into an up and down cycle. Alden Thompson, a Bible teacher of mine at Walla Walla College used to call it the roller coaster. They would fall away from God, bad things would happen to them, and they would return to God. They would prosper for a while and then they would gradually fall away again. The Bible records information about the kings of Israel and Judah. For some, it says, "So and so reigned

for so many years and did that which is evil in the sight of the Lord.” For others, it says, “So and so reigned for so many years and did that which is right in the eyes of the Lord.” But most of them were evil.

When we get to **2 Kings 13**, Elisha had come to the end of his amazing ministry, not to mention a series of amazing miracles. And now Joash had become King of Judah. Was Joash an evil king or a righteous king? Let’s read in chapter 13, verse 10–11:

*10 In the thirty-seventh year of Joash king of Judah, Jehoash<sup>F16</sup> the son of Jehoahaz became king over Israel in Samaria, and reigned sixteen years. 11 And he did evil in the sight of the Lord. He did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin, but walked in them.*

Now I don’t want you to get confused. Some versions call him Joash and some call him Jehoash. So it says Joash did evil in the sight of the Lord. And yet Joash believed that the success of the country was linked somehow to Elisha and his God.

[Read 2 Kings 13:14–19]

So there sits Elisha, holy man of God, although not feeling quite up to par. And in walks Joash, the evil heathen king. What would you say if you were Elisha? I’m not going to help you! You don’t deserve to be helped!” Many of you know that I work with difficult students. And I must admit, there have been a few times that I have felt like saying that to them. “I’m not going to help you! You don’t deserve to be helped!” Have you ever felt like saying that to someone? Have you ever felt like saying that to your church? But what does Elisha do? He helps him. He reminds me of Jesus. Jesus never turned away anyone who came to him for help.

We read in the story that Elisha had come down with a fatal illness. So you see, people of great faith get sick. People of tremendous faith die. And it is folly to believe that sickness or death results from a lack of faith or commitment to God. Sickness and death happen to everybody. *“Judge not and you will not be judged.”* When the King saw him, he was shocked by his appearance. The prophet was terminally ill. We are told that the King wept over him. But this was not simply the distress of a relative or a friend for a dying loved one.

You see, Elisha was the vital connection between the nation and God. The prophet could make all the difference between victory and defeat in time of war. That is why the King cries out ‘My father, my father – the chariots and horsemen of Israel.’ In fact this is the very phrase used by Elisha to

describe Elijah when he was taken up into heaven in **2 Kings 2:12**. In other words, the Man of God who brings the Word of God was considered the true protector and champion of Israel.

Elisha tells him to get a bow and some arrows. And the king did. Elisha tells him, "Take your bow and get ready to shoot!" He told the king to open the east window, which faced towards the region beyond Jordan under Syrian control. The Bible says they shot it together. Then Elisha said, "Shoot!" And as they shot the arrow, Elisha cried out, "The Arrow of the Lord's Deliverance!" Then he told the king to take the rest of the arrows and strike the ground with them. The king struck the ground three times and then stopped. Elisha said, "You should have struck the ground five or six times!" Then you would have defeated the Syrians and completely destroyed them! But now you will only defeat the Syrians three times."

It seems as though Elisha asked Joash to do something that modeled prayer.

- Shooting the arrow required effort and aim, and instruction and help from the prophet of God.
- Shooting the arrow had to be done through an open window, just as praying through an open window was more common in those days.
- Shooting the arrow and smiting arrows on the ground had to be done without knowing the exact outcome ahead of time. The target was only fully known by faith.
- Smiting the arrows on the ground was ineffective because it was not repeated enough, reflecting a lack of confidence in the process.
- Smiting the arrows on the ground had its strategic moment, and when that moment passed it was gone.
- Failing to smite the arrows with more enthusiasm eventually hurt others, not only himself.

Now you might say, how was King Joash to know that he was supposed to strike those arrows with more enthusiasm? It's not fair! It wasn't his fault. Is that true? But when they shot the first arrow and Elisha called out, "The Arrow of the Lord's Deliverance!" don't you think he should have known that all of these actions had some kind of spiritual significance? After all, Elisha was a prophet of God! And does this mean that he should do it in some formal ceremonial way? Tap. Tap. Tap. Visions come to my mind of some of the formal religious ceremonies held

in some churches today. Everything prim and proper. Now I can understand if you are the priest whose job is to sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat. You have to do it with reverence, right? But the situation with King Joash is very different. Here is a prophet of God asking him to hit the ground with the arrows, and what for? Joash should have at least an idea of what that might represent. He should have done it with more enthusiasm! Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam! This is not a kid's game! This is something of great spiritual significance!

You see, what God was looking for in the King was not empty emotionalism or a going through the motions, but faithful obedience – being fully committed and enthusiastic for God.

Now consider what great things may lie in a man's hand. There stood Joash, an unworthy king; and yet in his hands lay, in great measure, the destiny of his people.

If he would take the arrows, and pound them five or six times, their great enemy will be broken in pieces. If he only pounds them three times, he will get only a few victories; and poor Israel will ultimately have to suffer again from this enemy, who has been only been wounded, and not killed.

You do not know, dear friends, what responsibility lies upon you.

You are the father of a family; what blessings may come to your household, or may be missed by your children, through your conduct!

Or maybe you are a mother. Your job is equally as important; your child's future will depend upon your teaching, or non-teaching. Great events depend upon little matters, as large objects hang upon small nails; and you who are here this morning, sitting in the chairs, and meditating upon your future, may do that which shall lead many to heaven; but if you decide another way, you may do that which will curse many through time and eternity. Every action is like a ripple in the water, which starts out small and grows outward until it has affected a much larger area.

I heard about a serial killer from Utah who was once an Eagle Scout. Once he was asked why he did it. "Well", he said, "I got to thinking about that, and it all led back to a cup of coffee. Being a Mormon, he said, "I knew I shouldn't be drinking coffee and I said well, if I'm gonna do this, I might as well do that. And if I'm gonna do that, I might as well do the other, etc., etc. And that cycle led him down a very dark path.

Throughout your life, you will be given this responsibility or that, or you will have the opportunity to accept your God given responsibility that you know you ought to do, and how needful it is that the grace of God should be with you, to guide you, that you may not be an injury to others by

what you do or leave undone. We have just begun a new year. Many of you have perhaps set new resolutions or goals for yourself. Some of you have perhaps accepted new positions or perhaps you have ended a position that you have previously held.

The Bible says, "*A man's heart plans his way, But the Lord directs his steps.*" (Pr 16:9)

God has a plan for our life. Don't miss the call.

Notice what great results may come from very little acts. It was a very trifling thing, was it not, to shoot an arrow from a bow? Maybe you have seen a child do it or maybe you have done it yourself when you were young. It reminds me of the act that Captain Naaman was asked to perform. He basically said, "What? The prophet wants me to go dunk in that muddy river? What for? I know of some cleaner rivers back home. I'm going home." But it was not a trifling matter. It was a test of obedience. Very much like the test of obedience on Adam and Eve with the tree of knowledge of good and evil. On all of these occasions, they might have said, "God wouldn't be nitpicky about a thing like that!" But as we can see, these things DO matter and strict obedience IS important. Perhaps there have been moments in your life when a little action or event seemed insignificant, but proved to be great in its consequences. Some things may seem no bigger than a mustard seed in significance, but mustard seeds grow to be very large plants. Therefore, do not trifle with little things, for on these little things may hang the greatest things, even the great things of an eternal state.

What are some things that we give up too easily? Some give up the fight against sin too easily. Don't give up, or you are sure to be lost. The Bible says, "You have not yet resisted unto blood." You must be determined. Maybe you give up a few sins and you say, "Well, I think I can tolerate the rest." You should have hit five or six times when you only hit three.

"Oh!" someone says, "that is my besetting sin." How often is that used as an excuse!

I have a coworker who used to live in Johannesburg, South Africa. He tells me that for a young lady to walk alone from one side of that city to the other, she has a 90% chance of getting raped.

If I were to go across Johannesburg and a dozen men were to come around, and knock me down and rob me, I could say I was beset by them; but when I stop at home, and ask them into my house, and feast with them, and let them rob me, I cannot talk about being beset, for I have invited them there. Charles Spurgeon puts it this way:

"Some people tolerate themselves in sin. One says, "Well, you see, I always was so hot-tempered." You've ought to cool down then. Another says, "I was always very irritable." You must get rid of that irritableness, my dear friend; the grace of God should teach you to

overcome that evil habit. We sin, but we must not tolerate any sin. It will ruin a man if he sits down, and says, "I cannot overcome that sin." You must overcome it; every sin is to be overcome; and if you have smitten three times, and stayed, you must not rest satisfied. The man of God will not give you any peace if that is your condition; but he will say to you, "Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times." There must be a clean sweep of every sin, for Christ has died, not to save us in our sins, but to save us from our sins."

Many of us know about justification by faith. It is really quite simple. But what about sanctification? Can you be saved if you are not sanctified? Be a diligent student of God's Word. Live as if it means something to you. You say faith as the grain of a mustard seed will save you. O.K., but are you always going to be a tiny little mustard seed? What is a mustard seed worth if it doesn't grow? A few of weeks ago, Mitch talked about bearing fruit. And you heard what happened to the tree that didn't bear fruit. It was destroyed.

Don't be satisfied until you see your progress. Oh, you brought a soul to Christ, did you? Bring another! Don't become a stagnant pool! We must keep the cleansing flow going. Let's make the Sabbath School grow till all the boys and girls in this area are attending. You say, "Come on Ken, you've got to be kidding." But where is your vision? Have you tried to win them? If so, don't stop, but redouble your efforts.

I heard about someone who visited Paris and went to a restaurant. They serve very small portions. They brought this guy a tiny little steak with a cute little garnish. It looked like a sample. He ate it quickly and said, "Yea that's the stuff! Bring me some of that!" When Persy gets a small portion in a restaurant and I ask her how it was, she says to me in Spanish, "Se quedo en una muella" which means it got stuck in a molar. In other words, "I'm still hungry." And we are hungry for souls here. So I say to you, "Bring me some more of that." You brought three? Good. Now bring five or six.

It seems like the church has been satisfied with now and then stirring up the baptismal pool, and the adding of half-a-dozen or so in a year! Whatever happened to the men of God who cry out in agony for the lost souls around them who don't rest until they have brought others to God? Why do we give up so easily? Because we don't see the results of our efforts?

We must be persistent.

Would you give up helping your own family?

Then why would you give up helping your church?

Think that you cannot do what you used to do, and give up your religious engagements because you are getting so old? Giving up a position because you are old is a sure way to make yourself old. I hope you don't give up until something really prevents you from working. And then maybe you can work for God in other avenues. Why do we give up so easily?

If Elisha was holding his hand, and then let Joash do it alone, perhaps Joash was like many Christians today, too dependent upon the ministers to do it for them. Or even the other church members. I hope I don't still have to carry my children around when they are twenty-six. God has given each one of us a work to do and we will one day give an account of what we have done. President John F. Kennedy once said, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." And so I appeal to you today, "Ask not what your church can do for you; ask what you can do for your church."

Danny Shelton of 3ABN (Three Angel's Broadcasting Network) once asked himself, "Why doesn't our church have a TV Station? Why doesn't our church have this? Why doesn't our church have that?" And then he realized that HE was the church. He said, "I am the church. You are the church."

A harp is made up of many different strings, each with a unique and distinct sound. When one string is played in harmony with other strings, the harp can produce beautiful music. In the same way, the church consists of members who each have unique gifts and abilities. As members put their talents to use in a united effort, the church becomes effective in doing the work God has asked it to do.

I ran across an interesting parable recently that kind of sums it up. As most of you know, a parable is a story whose purpose is to illustrate a point. The parable goes like this. And it came to pass that a certain farmer decided to grow wheat. He spent weeks cultivating the soil carefully, fertilizing, and setting up his sprinkler system. He drove his battered truck to town and bought a tractor and a harvester. Then he impatiently waited for the first emerald sprouts to appear.

But day after day, as he bounded out of bed and peered across the misty fields, he was disappointed. His precious wheat simply wasn't growing. He checked the sprinklers, researched the soil, and prayed earnestly. Finally he bit his lip, went to his wheat farmer neighbors, and asked the obvious question, "Why do you think my wheat isn't growing?"

His farmer friends charged into his driveway in their trucks, spewing clouds of dust. Together in silence the farmers marched out to view his dark fields, in strange contrast to the brilliant green all around. They scratched their heads and asked, "What kind did you plant?"

The farmer was speechless. He kicked a clod of dirt around, shuffled his boots, and mumbled awkwardly. "I prayed for wheat. I worked hard. I really wanted it to grow. But I guess I never actually planted seeds."

Of course this parable isn't true. A farmer wouldn't expect a harvest when he hadn't planted anything. But I can't say the same for many churches. Many evangelists and pastors have experienced the frustration and disappointment of members when an evangelistic series did not bring in the harvest that they expected. But what is generally the cause? Few or no seeds were sown by the members. You cannot convince me that it is the pastor's job to sow all the seeds. Without the help of the members, the church can hardly be expected to grow.

Why do we give up so easily?

Perhaps we become contented too easily. I have done three. That's good enough for me. Let us never be content with our attainments, or with our services, and let us do much more than we have yet attempted for our dear Lord, who has bought us with his precious blood. Perhaps Joash stopped at three because of his unbelief, or should I say, his lack of faith. He could not see how shooting the arrows could affect the Syrians. As we have seen many times over in the Bible, God rewards our belief and our faith. God will do great things for you if you only believe. He is a rewarder of faith. Remember that even Christ could not do many mighty works in his own country because of the people's unbelief.

Or maybe Joash was just not in the mood. Have you ever heard that one from somebody?

You WERE in the mood when you ran to your amusements, to watch a movie or whatever it is you enjoy doing. Why not give God some of that energy?

I don't think I could put it better than these words of Charles Spurgeon in 1889:

"Joash also probably had too little zeal. He was not wide awake, he was not thoroughly aroused, and he did not care for the glory of God. If he could beat the Syrians three times, that would be quite enough for him. He thought that they would have had enough of it, too; and so he laid down his bow and his arrows. I wonder whether I am speaking to anybody who has just been putting up his bow and arrows, some brother who has made up his mind that he will retire from the school, or one who has so much to do in the world that he must give up that station. If so, turn this



subject over, and ask yourselves whether you were not sent in here today on purpose to be told that you ought to have shot five or six times, and done much more than you have done. God does speak to men here often; and very pointedly sometimes. God does speak to men's consciences by his servants; and I put it to every child of God here whether this is not a message from God, "Keep on; keep on as long as there is life in you; keep on growing in grace, and advancing in the service of Christ."

Just what was Joash's excuse? Maybe it was one of these:

- "I stopped shooting because I didn't want to be presumptuous and ask for too much."
- "I stopped shooting because I'm not a very good archer."
- "I stopped shooting because Elisha didn't help me more."
- "I stopped shooting because I thought three was plenty."
- "I stopped shooting because I didn't think it would do any good."
- "I stopped shooting because I wasn't in a shooting mood. I didn't feel like it."
- "I stopped shooting because I didn't want to get over-excited."

"So there are some who think that hearing the gospel is a little thing. Life, death, and hell, and worlds unknown, may hang upon the preaching and hearing of a sermon. To hear attentively, and not be disturbed in the sermon, may seem a very insignificant thing; and yet upon the catching of the word may result either the attainment of faith or the absence of faith, and so the salvation that comes by faith." (Spurgeon)

And what the consequence of stopping after only three blows? Did it affect Joash only? NO. All Israel was affected. And so it is with us. Others suffer with us. Your children, your neighbors, your friends; who can tell how many may suffer because you are slack in grace, and in the service of the God of grace?

God is dishonored and the enemy is pleased. You may take a break, but he is not going to. An army captain once said to his men, "Do you see that enemy over there? If you do not kill them, they will kill you." It's still true today. If you do not overthrow the powers of evil, the powers of evil will overthrow you.

Seek him more earnestly, cling more closely to Christ, and you will soon get the blessing. Don't let your own hand lock you out of the kingdom. And we must ask ourselves, to what extent is the spiritual ineffectiveness of the church traceable to the lack of determination and commitment to God's cause on behalf of his people? Quite a lot I would suspect. But it should not be. Not when you profess to worship this God. If men are earnest, if men are believing, if men are prayerful, such and such a blessing will come;" and that the blessing does not come, may be rightly traced to the fact that they were not as prayerful and as believing as they ought to have been.

You've got to be enthusiastic, perseverant, and devoted! Think about the things that you are enthusiastic about. Can you not give the same enthusiasm into the work of the Lord? And so you've got to have enthusiasm. That is not to say that you must jump up and down and shout halleluiah. Although there is nothing wrong with that. But the kind of enthusiasm that is necessary is action and dedication, devotion, and commitment to the cause.

If you want to see what Jesus was talking about when He said "life more abundantly", and if you want to experience the peace that Elisha had whenever he saw the enemy approaching, then you must take your religion seriously. Jesus did not do half-hearted service when he came to give His life for you. He did not forsake us. He went through with the plan until He was able to proclaim, "It is finished!" Jesus is our example. So we should keep shooting too.

- Keep shooting in the battle against sin.
- Keep shooting in the attainment of Christian knowledge.
- Keep shooting in the attainment of faith.
- Keep shooting to do more for the kingdom of God.
- Keep shooting because the world, the flesh, and the devil will not stop their shooting.

You see, hope must have a foundation. And if you have that foundation, then you have something to be excited about. Hope must have a foundation. Faith needs to be supported by enthusiasm and commitment to the cause. Are you committed?

Jesus said, "Take up your cross and follow me." There may be someone here today that has lain down their cross. If so, I urge you to take it up again. As Jesus was going up to Mount Calvary, He was crushed under the weight of the cross. So they enlisted Simon the Cyrene to carry it for Him. If you want to say with me today, "Lord, I accept your challenge. I will take up my cross and follow you, then please stand with me as we sing."

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Hymn #328: *Must Jesus Bear The Cross Alone*

Spanish #263