

OPEN HIS EYES

SERIES: FIRE FROM HEAVEN



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2 Kings 6:13-23
11th Message
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We're at the end of a study of the prophet Elijah and the enduring message of his life: *The best is yet to come! God has not failed, and he has not forgotten.*

The accounts of Elijah and Elisha found in 1 and 2 Kings were written to help us be sure of what we hope for (Romans 15:4). They were also written to teach us the lessons of the lives of these men, who knew the Lord, followed him, and grew in their faith. How can we be the people of God, even as we wait? How does grace work its way in us? So, as we come to the end now, we'll do well to review.

Consider the following five statements from the New Testament that express themes found in the stories of Elijah and Elisha:

- “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it” (John 1:5, NRSV). With the ascendancy of Ahab and Jezebel to the throne, the forces of wickedness seemed poised to annihilate the small remnant in Israel. It seemed as if their wicked authority and arrogance would extinguish the light forever. But it did not and never will.
- “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you ...” (Acts 1:8a). The stories of Elijah and Elisha are accounts of power. God’s spokesman declaring his truth has the power to alter everything. The gospel is not about sentiment or feelings or even theology alone. It is about power and we’ve seen that when these men spoke, things changed—drought came, fire fell, healings occurred, and armies of angels appeared.
- “God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong ...” (1 Corinthians 1:27b). Repeatedly in these accounts we find that God’s attention was given to the marginalized; the community of faith that had been set aside and disregarded by everyone else. Kings were regarded with scorn. Widows, slave girls, and the poor were given prominence and were in fact the ones through whom God worked and to whom

he spoke.

- “[We] worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh ...” (Philippians 3:3b). Recall the period of Elijah’s despair, the lowest point of his life, when he called on God to take his life. His sense of his own place in the grand scheme of things had grown too large. He had confidence in the flesh, if you will, and that led to a hard fall. It is God who deserves the praise. We worship and rejoice in him, not in our own accomplishments.
- “One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see” (John 9:25b). This statement was made by a blind man whom Jesus healed. Blindness and the gift of sight are the theme of the passage we’re going to consider in this message (2 Kings 6:13-23).

Everybody begins life in the dark. None of us start out with abiding, life-giving faith in God. We start with inadequacy and blindness as our initial condition, and then as he intervenes on our behalf, we are granted sight. We’ll observe this process in the story of Elisha and his servant in Dothan.

Let me set the scene. The occasion once again was warfare. The king of Aram to the north had embarked on a campaign of military aggression against Israel. Elisha in some mysterious way was given insight into Aram’s military plans and was able to warn the armies of Israel to avoid disaster. This infuriated the king of Aram, so he decided to neutralize Elisha.

Before we read the text, let me make one more preliminary observation. The king was targeting Elisha for violence, probably execution. Elisha had been singled out for persecution. We should remember that Jesus said that those who are persecuted for righteousness are blessed (Matthew 5:10). We should be those who challenge bullies, who sound warnings, who prevent bloodshed as Elisha was doing here, who bring secret things out into the light. Our lives should thwart those who would twist or degrade what is beautiful. There ought to be something about us,

as salt arrests corruption, that gets in the way of powerful and hurtful people.

2 Kings 6:13-17:

¹³So he said, “Go and see where he is, that I may send and take him.” And it was told him, saying, “Behold, he is in Dothan.” ¹⁴He sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city.

¹⁵Now when the attendant of the man of God had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was circling the city. And his servant said to him, “Alas, my master! What shall we do?” ¹⁶So he answered, “Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” ¹⁷Then Elisha prayed and said, “O LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.” And the LORD opened the servant’s eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

Those who are with us

We can readily imagine the prophet and his servant in the city of Dothan as they woke up, looked over the wall, and saw enemy soldiers surrounding the city. They were trapped. These soldiers were there to do them harm. The servant cried out, “All is lost!” But Elisha, saw what the servant couldn’t see and prayed to God. Suddenly on the hills surrounding the Aramean army the servant saw the armies of God, horses and chariots of fire!

The apostle Paul declared in 2 Corinthians 5:7, “We walk by faith, not by sight.” It is central to Christian faith that we believe what God has promised, we are sure of his nature and confident of his sovereignty. So even when wickedness appears to be on the ascendancy everywhere, we walk by faith in the things we can’t see, rather than being overwhelmed by what is apparent. That perspective is at the heart of this story.

There is another important truth in this text. In the experience of Elisha and his servant, we see what it means to be the church. Jesus says, “Where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst” (Matthew 18:20)—a basic description of the

body of Christ. We can learn lessons about life together from observing these two men in this setting. They faced a common danger, spoke of fear and faith, prayed, and gained hope together. We should never underestimate the mysterious and powerful use God makes of each member of his family in giving life to the others.

Some dangers are overturned by miraculous intervention, others by slower, more ordinary means. Some end in sorrow, even death. Yet Elisha’s word to his servant rings true in all cases: “Do not fear.” We help each other trust God for the future he has prepared for us, knowing that from the perspective of eternity he accomplishes only what is good.

Note that Elisha prayed for his servant. “Lord, open his eyes. Help him see the invisible realities.” When we don’t have words because our faith is weak and we’re struggling, a brother or sister can speak to God the things that we can’t articulate ourselves, filling the role of Elisha in the life of his servant. Few gifts are more valuable.

The servant’s fears were overturned by a presence that has been there all along. Elisha didn’t pray, “Lord, do something! We’re in a mess.” He prayed, “Open his eyes.” We’re not in a mess, actually. If we could see, we would realize that God has already acted on our behalf and prepared a way for us.

It says at the end of verse 17 that the horses and chariots of fire were “all around Elisha.” Presumably they were on the hills all around Dothan, but Elisha in particular was at the center of their circle, the focus of their attention. God is present wherever we are. We are in his sight, his hand is upon us. Times of danger and uncertainty are the ones most likely to make clear to blind eyes the powerful presence of God.

I hope that when we’re at church, gathered in homes, meeting for Bible study, or when “we have risen early and gone out,” we help each other face fear, pray for each other, and discover the encircling power and concern of God that’s there all the time.

“But I say to you, love your enemies”

There is another piece to this picture and that is ministry to those outside the faith. It is not just about discovering what’s true for us, being strengthened ourselves, and growing better as the people of God. The rest of this story

is about blessing those who present themselves as enemies.

I said earlier that it's important at times that we get in the way of the worst plans, that we're part of the process that calls to account wickedness, evil, and arrogance. But our other role is to be a blessing, to extend hope, life, welcome, and love to those who are outside.

2 Kings 6:18-20:

¹⁸When they came down to him, Elisha prayed to the LORD and said, "Strike this people with blindness, I pray." So He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. ¹⁹Then Elisha said to them, "This is not the way, nor is this the city; follow me and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." And he brought them to Samaria.

²⁰When they had come into Samaria, Elisha said, "O LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see." So the LORD opened their eyes and they saw; and behold, they were in the midst of Samaria.

Somehow these soldiers were rendered unable to see, and they were led into a place where they were now surrounded. The circumstances had been reversed, and they were now the ones whose necks were in the noose. The point of this, as we'll see in a moment, was to bless them, although it's not obvious at first.

I mentioned the incident of the blind man healed by Jesus. At the end of that account Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind." The Pharisees overheard this and realize that they were being accused by this teacher of moral failure. They asked him, "You're not saying we're blind, are you?" Jesus' answer to them was interesting. He said, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains" (John 9:41). The first step in getting help from God is discovering that you're blind. Until you are rendered incapable, until you discover that you can't save yourself, you won't discover that you can receive help from God. The soldiers in our story were rendered blind in order to

be given a gift from the Lord.

2 Kings 6:21-23:

²¹Then the king of Israel when he saw them, said to Elisha, "My father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?" ²²He answered, "You shall not kill them. Would you kill those you have taken captive with your sword and with your bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master." ²³So he prepared a great feast for them; and when they had eaten and drunk he sent them away, and they went to their master. And the marauding bands of Arameans did not come again into the land of Israel.

Once more a king of Israel was clueless. It wouldn't make any sense to kill these men who couldn't fight back. Rather, at Elisha's direction they were given a feast. They were loved. Through this action, the war ended. They discovered, as Naaman the commander of the armies of Aram once discovered, that there was a God in Israel who should be worshiped.

Elisha was both a challenge to the armies of Aram and finally a blessing to them. Again, it's worth asking not only how we can bless one another when we're gathered together, but how we can throw a feast for those who don't yet know the One who loves them with all his heart.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:18, "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." This final lessons in the stories of Elijah and Elisha are about having our eyes opened to see the presence, power, and love of God for us and about extending love to those who don't yet know him.

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