

Those who are with us are more

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[0 : 00] I want to turn back there with me to this incident in the life of Elisha. Now this story takes us back to about 800 years before when Jesus was born.

And it's a world very different from our world today, isn't it? A time in the history of Israel when the people of Israel were in almost constant war with Syria to the north.

A couple of chapters ago in the book, we read how Elisha had healed the commander of Syria's army, Naaman.

After that healing, there was a period of peace, but clearly it hadn't lasted all that long. Because they came back. Syria again at war with Israel.

Was it the same king? We don't know. The only constant person in the story is Elisha. But the writer paints this wonderful picture of the king of Syria making his plans.

[1 : 14] He's going to attack here, going to attack Israel there, going to send the raiding party down there. And Elisha, God reveals it to Elisha.

Elisha tells the king of Israel, and the king of Israel stares out of the way. So, the king of Syria's plans are frustrated. Time after time, they're frustrated.

And the king of Syria, not surprisingly, he starts thinking, there must be a mole in the camp. You know, somebody on Israel's side.

Somebody telling them what we're going to do, a traitor. So, he says, who is on the side of the king of Israel, he asks. Who is on the side of the king of Israel?

And his servants know what's going on. That's the interesting thing.

[2 : 09] His servants tell him. One of his servants says, none, my lord. Verse 12, O king. But Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, he tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom.

Interesting that the servants of the king of Syria knew what was happening, but they hadn't told him. Perhaps they were frightened. Or perhaps they were hoping it would all go away.

That one of these days Elisha wouldn't know what was going on. Or one day, somehow, they would beat him. And they hadn't told him, but they knew. And they were able to tell him. So, the king gives the order, go and find him.

And then go and capture him. Go and seize him. How did he think he was going to be able to capture Elisha, I wonder?

Elisha, who knew what was happening. God was revealing to Elisha. How did he think he was going to capture him? I don't know. But he wanted to try. He wanted to try.

[3 : 09] And this reminds us, doesn't it, of the hardness of men's hearts. And their readiness, our readiness without Jesus to fight against God.

It takes us back to, think back to Pharaoh in Egypt. Time after time, there were the plagues in Egypt. Time after time, he had to plead with Moses, please take this plague away from me.

But he kept opposing God. He kept fighting against God. He wouldn't submit. Until that day when his whole army was drowned in the Red Sea.

He kept fighting against God. And we think of Herod, even. He thought he could kill the baby Jesus. He couldn't. He couldn't. You see, it's impossible to fight against God.

Impossible to take God by surprise. And yet, so many people try. And we see how God's enemies are frustrated by the power of God.

[4 : 13] The second psalm says, Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? It says, He who sits in heaven laughs. The Lord holds them in derision.

Then he will speak to them in his wrath and terrify them in his fury. All the plotting of men and nations against God.

It doesn't disturb God on his throne. He reigns on high. He reigns supreme. The Lord laughs at them.

How futile it is to fight against God. The omnipotent one. The all-knowing one. The everywhere present one. Before whom the nations are like a drop in a bucket. Like the dust on the weighing scales.

This is our God. And that's why God's enemies are always finally frustrated. And when even the opposition of men works out to the greater glory of God.

[5 : 16] Think again of Pharaoh. In Exodus 7 verses 1 to 5. Turn there with me. In your Bibles, Exodus 7 verses 1 to 5.

It's when God is telling Moses that Pharaoh is going to oppose him. And the Lord said to Moses, See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh. And your brother Aaron will be your prophet.

You shall speak all that I command you. And your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of the land. But I will harden Pharaoh's heart. And though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, Pharaoh will not listen to you.

Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them.

You see, God was going to use the opposition of Pharaoh for his glory. They would see his glory, his power, and have to bow before his great power.

[6 : 37] So God showed his miracles again and again in Egypt and was glorified in saving his people. And I wonder, is there anyone here tonight and you are fighting against God, resisting him in some way?

He's speaking to you, but you don't want to obey. He's calling you. He's directing your life. He's pointing out something in your life. But you don't want to obey.

You're resisting God. You know, we cannot oppose God. We cannot. If you resist him and refuse him, refuse to obey him, you only harm yourself.

If you refuse his salvation, you harm yourself forever. But, and if you continually refuse him, if we continually refuse him, we're hardening our hearts.

And at times, God might let us have our own way and harden our hearts to, like he did to Pharaoh. So the first thing we see in this passage is the frustrated enemies of God.

[7 : 51] Second thing we see is the believers' needless fears. The believers' needless fears. Pharaoh's, not Pharaoh's, Elisha's young servant goes out in the morning to fetch water or whatever he had to do to light the fire, to cook the breakfast and this town is surrounded by chariots and horsemen.

Panic. Panic. What are we going to do? He says. We're outnumbered big time. We're going to be captured and possibly killed. What shall we do?

You see, he could only see with his natural eyes. He was a young man. He hadn't been with Elisha all that long. Remember when Elisha had hidden Naaman of his leprosy, his servant had been called Gehazi and Gehazi had been covetous of Naaman's money and he had cheated and told lies to get some of it and he had become a leper.

So he had to leave Elisha. So this is a new servant who doesn't, hasn't been there all that long maybe. And this young man didn't yet have the eyes of faith.

But Elisha did. Elisha did. He could see what God was doing. Elisha reassures him in verse 16. He says, don't be afraid. Those with us are more than those that are with them.

[9 : 26] Now there's a big army around the city and the young man can't see that. But he says, those with us are more than those who are with them. And Elisha prays, open his eyes, Lord.

Open his eyes. So Lord, open the eyes of the young man. Verse 17. And he saw. Behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

the yard around Elisha. Unseen to human eyes. But there, but there. You see, no one can touch or harm God's people unless their defender allows it.

Unless God allows it. You serve a sovereign God who's in control. In control. and a kind heavenly father.

John Payton, missionary to the New Hebrides from Dumfries Shire. In the early days when he was there, the local people turned against him.

[10 : 34] Quite hostile. And one night they surrounded the mission station in Tenton on burning it out and killing John Payton and his wife. That night, Payton and his wife prayed all night long that God would deliver him.

And when daylight came and nothing had happened, they were amazed to see all the local people leave. A year later, the chief of the tribe was converted to Christ.

John Payton asked him, he said, what happened that night? Why didn't you? Why didn't you attack us like you were going to? And the chief replied in surprise.

He said, well, who were all those men with you there? Well, Patton knew there was no men there. But the chief said he was afraid to attack because he had seen hundreds of big men in shining garments circling for the mission station.

God had provided an armed guard, a guard around his children. Amazing, isn't it? when Jesus was arrested and Peter got out his sword and cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest, remember?

[11 : 49] And Jesus said, no, put your sword away. Don't you think I couldn't call ten legions of angels to come and protect me if I wanted to? Help was available.

But Jesus had come to die so the help wasn't called. The legions had to watch in amazement as Jesus was arrested and crucified and died.

You know, Jesus was saying to Peter, Peter, I'm not lacking in resources, you know. I'm not lacking in resources, but we're not calling them in this time.

So, the protecting hand of God, Elisha's servant's fears were needless. He needed to see what God was doing, invisible to human eyes, but real.

Now, in Jesus' case, and very often, we aren't spared the trouble or even death. Many believers have faced an army of persecutors and have suffered and died, but still it's true that those who are with us are greater than those who are with them.

[13 : 10] I wonder if you remember Pilgrim's Progress, and Christian, the pilgrim, and his colleague faithful were traveling the pilgrim way, and they came to the city of vanity, and they got caught up in vanity fair, and they were arrested, abused, and for some reason their abusers chose faithful, and he was tried and condemned, and he was beaten, and pierced by swords, and finally burned.

Christian could only watch on, he was in a cage, if I remember right, locked up, but you know as he watched on, as he looked on, he could see that behind the crowd, he said there was a chariot and horsemen waiting, and as soon as faithful died, he was carried up through the clouds with a sound of trumpet, the nearest way to the celestial city.

It's a wonderful picture, isn't it? Faithful, not protected by his enemies, but the chariot was there to take him home. How often we find ourselves in difficult situations, and we're faithful, we cannot see a way out, we're small and weak, how can we survive?

How can we face the personal problems that are coming into our lives, that cancer treatment, that medical problem that there's no solution to, that problem in the family, that problem at work?

How will we cope? We worry, and we forget the chariots of fire that surround God's people. You know, often God doesn't show us the chariots and horsemen.

[15 : 05] In fact, I would say generally he doesn't show us the chariots and horsemen. But we must go on, we must go on, we must believe as Elisha prayed, Lord, open his eyes that he might see.

We must be confident in verse 16. Do not be afraid for those who are with me are more than those who are with them. We must be confident in that even though we don't have verse 17.

The Lord is showing us the horse of the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire. Confident that if we must walk through the fire, our Father is walking through it with us.

Confident even if we had to die for Christ, the chariots are there to take us home. The believers, needless fears.

It reminded me as I was preparing this of a hymn. I'll read it to you. Written by Paul Gerhart and translated by John Wesley.

[16 : 17] And he wrote, Give to the winds thy fears. Hope and be undismayed. God hears thy sighs and counts thy tears. God shall lift up thy head.

Through waves and clouds and storms, he gently clears thy way. wait thou his time. So shall this night soon end in joyous day.

Leave to his sovereign sway to choose and to command. So shalt thou wandering own his way. How wise, how strong his hand. Far, far above thy thought his counsel shall appear when fully he the work has wrought that caused thy needless fear.

thou seest our weakness Lord. Our hearts are known to thee. Oh lift thou up the sinking hand. Confirm the feeble need.

Let us in life and death thy steadfast truth declare and publish with our latest breath thy love and guardian care.

[17 : 27] Give to the winds thy fears. the believers needless fears. The third thing I want us to think about here, we've had God's enemies frustrated, we've seen the believers needless fears.

Finally, I want us to think about the far reaching mercy of God. For we have a sovereign and a merciful God.

Elisha is looking out at this army, they're coming down now, they're approaching the city, coming to arrest him, to capture him. Verse 18 tells us, and when the Syrians came down against him, Elisha prayed to the Lord and said, please strike this people with blindness.

So he struck them with blindness in accordance with the prayer of Elisha. So the Syrian soldiers are blinded. Now the Lord's the one who opens blind his eyes.

He did it for Elisha's servant just earlier on, but he's also the one who can blind us, confuse us. Those who resist him and may find themselves blinded, like this army did.

[18 : 47] Some of the translators think that this doesn't mean that they were literally blinded and that they couldn't see but they were kind of befuddled. They couldn't understand what they were seeing. Apparently the word translated blinded here is only used one other term in the Old Testament and it describes what happened when the men tried to break in on Lot in Sodom and the angels blinded them and they couldn't find the door.

They staggered around and they couldn't find the door. So blinded probably means befuddled, confused, just not knowing what they were doing anymore.

It is hard to imagine a whole army blinded and walking along for ten miles from Dothan to Samaria with hands on the shoulders of the guy in front of them, isn't it?

And the horses too. so it would seem more likely they were befuddled, confused and they couldn't see enough to walk along or couldn't understand where they were.

Anyway, it was a ten mile walk, blinded or befuddled. It would have taken them at least three hours to walk along. And they come to the capital Samaria and they don't know where they are and they don't understand what they're seeing, if they're seeing anything.

[20 : 07] And they led into the town. Here there's the king of Israel. Here he has his army. And you'll be pretty sure that they were pretty much on the alert when they saw all these Syrians coming into the city.

And one imagines the men of Israel armed and watching, wondering, what are we going to do here? Look at all these guys. And Elisha prays for a third time.

He says, Lord, open their eyes. Verse 20, open their eyes. God did. We can imagine a very frightened Syrian army now at the mercy of the Israelite's army thinking, well, this is it.

Curtains for us now. And the king of Israel says, shall I kill them, my father? Shall I kill them? And he was very keen to do it.

And Elisha said, no, no, you don't murder your captives. Feed them and send them home. And so what is done. The Syrian army goes home unharmed. And for the moment, the war ends.

[21 : 17] And here we have a wonderful example of the mercy of God, the wide mercy of God. These men, this army, they were enemies of God and of God's people.

They had set out the night before to attack God's people and to attack God's servant. And yet here, Elisha says, no, no, feed them, send them home. And you see, there in Samaria, surrounded by the army of Israel, these Syrians had, in a way, come under the protection and mercy of the God of Israel.

And God showed them mercy. They had the opportunity to come to know the mercy of God. The king of Samaria, he should have recognized the goodness of God.

He will have known about Naaman even if he wasn't the same king. But sadly, it seems that he didn't learn a lesson. And we read in verse 24 that he attacked again.

He didn't learn the lesson. And if we read on into chapter 8, we find that this king of Assyria, or the next one, it's all very hard to tell, was eventually murdered in his bed.

[22 : 44] But here, here we see the mercy of God, the wideness of God's mercy. You see, the good news of the gospel is for all men.

Nice respectable folk, church-going folk, those who never come to church, those who are actively fighting against God, we can tell them that Jesus died for them, calls them to himself.

We pray they will hear and repent. As you say, Ben-Hadad didn't, it seemed. But Paul is an example of someone who was opposing God and who did repent and believe and became the great servant of Jesus.

There's a wideness in God's mercy like the wideness of the sea. There's a kindness in his justice which is more than liberty. There is plentiful redemption in the blood that has been shed.

There is joy for all the members in the sorrow of the head. For the love of God is broader than the measure of man's mind and the heart of the eternal is most wonderfully kind.

[23 : 53] The heart of the eternal is most wonderfully kind. He maketh the rebel a priest and a king. He has brought us and taught us this new song to sing.

Unto him who has loved us and washed us from sin. Unto him be the glory forever. Amen. We have here the far-reaching mercy of God.

So three things here. God's enemies frustrated. The futility of opposing and fighting against God.

The believers needless fears. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them. Even if we can't see them. And the far-reaching mercy of God.

The gospel that we have is to be spread widely and far among all who will listen.

[24 : 52] May God bless his word to all our hearts this evening. Let's pray. Father, we do thank you now for this, your word again.

And we do thank you for being a sovereign God in control of even the most difficult situations. You're there in control when we cannot see any way out. We thank you, Lord.

Father, help us to remember that at all times. We so easily forget, Lord. Help us to remember. And Lord, how we thank you for the wideness in your mercy.

How we thank you to invite whosoever will to come and find salvation in Jesus Christ. Thank you for that, Lord. Help us to make your gospel widely known.

in this community around us here, that men and women might come to Jesus. Bless your word to all our hearts now, Lord. And as we shortly leave this place and as we go into a new week tomorrow, go with us to our homes, Lord.

[25 : 58] Help us at home, help us at work, help us with our neighbours, help us in all that we do during the week that lies ahead. we ask it, Lord, in Jesus' name.

Amen. I'm going to sing now from Sing Psalms, it's number 18, on page 21.

Sing Psalms 18, page 21, and we're going to sing from verses 30 to 36. For perfect is the way of God, no flaw is found within his word.

To all who put their trust in him, a shield and refuge is our God. Let's praise God, number 30 to 36. Amen. Amen.