

Lord, open our eyes that we may see

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to 2 Kings 6, reading from verse 17. 2 Kings 6, verse 17.

Elisha prayed and said, O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see. This great story is about two different kinds of seeing.

Two men, Elisha and a servant, and they look at the same situation and they see quite different things.

One sees one thing and one sees another thing. Let's note first of all what the young man, the servant, saw. He looks and what he sees is a great army of horses and chariots around the city. They're surrounded by this great hostile army. And they come from Syria to hunt out and liquidate this prophet Elisha.

[1 : 24] And the servant feels trapped. He feels helpless and hopeless. There's nothing they can do. Their cause is desperate.

Their cause is lost. Because on all sides there are horses and chariots and gleaming spears and swords and mighty warriors of Syria's elite troop.

And that's all that he sees. He sees this farrachs of opposition, of hostility on all sides. And in face of it, he and his master are completely at their mercy.

They are utterly helpless. And sometimes, as we look ourselves around us, that's what we see. We see a hopeless cause.

We see a vast army of opposition. We see hostility on every side. And we see hatred.

[2 : 32] And we see great talent, great forces, great wisdom and cunning organizing itself against God's cause and God's church.

Today, in many parts of the world, our fellow believers face violence. They face state opposition. They face imprisonment, torture, flogging. They face condemnation to death.

And every Lord's Day, we should remember those who are in that situation. They're due from us in terms of culture and so on.

But yet, they're one with us in the body of Christ. And these forces of evil, of evil violence, the sword of state, is drawn constantly against them.

[3 : 36] We don't face that today. We don't even see that around us. But we do see much else which discourages us and terrifies us. We see hostile media.

We see a hostile education system. We see culture and politics and public opinion which is so much at enmity with God and his church.

We see on all sides a little establishment which, again, even among ourselves, hates all that our faith stands for.

And that's what we see. We see our own weakness. Elisha and his servant. And a mighty army of many thousands.

Not in our case, with violence against us physically. But nevertheless, all those forces arrayed against us, so well organized and so talented.

[4 : 43] And so skilled and determined in all directions. But then, of course, behind them, behind those visible forces, there is another great force.

What the Lord himself called, there are the gates of hell. The parliament of pandemonium. And every single day of our lives, that parliament meets.

It holds its war cabinet meeting and plans every day how to liquidate the church of God on earth. It targets particular sectors. Churches, denominations. It targets every single one of us.

And the fourth, its army's goal. It's countless millions of demons. To attack the church worldwide.

[5 : 49] The church nationally. The church congregationally. The church individually. That is, Satan's stated policy.

And it can allocate to its progression this vast army of wickednesses in high places. Spiritual weakness. And yet, immensely potent. And he goes forth as a roaring lion to devour. He goes forth, snapping at our heels. At my heels and your heels. He goes forth with all his cunning because of his brilliant intellect.

Determined to undermine us. And to destroy us completely. That's the context in which we live. [6 : 46] And in which we work. And every single one of us. Every entity. Every national church. Denomination. Congregation.

Believer. Every single one of us. Is in Satan's sights. Around us. This great army. Not in our case of horses and chariots and spears and swords and so on.

But nevertheless. This great. Demonically organized campaign. To undermine and humiliate. And destroy. The church of the living God. And there's something also. In addition. Remarkably. And that is this. Here we have.

Two. Human. Individuals. A prophet and a servant. Only two of them. And yet. There's a hellish army.

[7 : 48] Which. Has come. To get them. It has targeted. This one man. This one man.

Elisha. And it hasn't sent. A cohort. Of perhaps a hundred soldiers. Or some. Small police force. But it has sent.

A whole. Mighty. Experienced. Way equipped. And well led army. To get. This. This. Usage prophet. Who knows.

All that the army. Plots and plans. In his innermost councils. The point. Surely. Is this. That sometimes. Hell.

Can target. You. Or me. Or anybody. And send. Against us. Not just one demon. Or five.

[8 : 44] Or a dozen. But see here. The whole. That force. That hell. Can command. Is sometimes. Sent. To attack.

One individual. And that's what's here. Go. Says Satan. Get Elisha. And he sends. An army. That army.

Is the army. Of his own. Demonic strategy. And it targets. This one man. And so. That's all. This young man.

Sees. He sees. This. Mighty. Opposition. Those. Great. Well equipped. Well organized. Warriors. And he feels.

Absolutely. Terrified. What can they do. In the face. Of such opposition. But then. Notice Elisha. How calm. Elisha is.

[9 : 39] And how. Utterly. Unafraid. Elisha is. And how composed. And how. Collected. He is. And why is that.

Because. He is seeing. Something. The young man. Doesn't see. He sees that. There are more forces. For him.

Than are against him. And he sees. Around him. This. Great. Force. As we're told. Of. The divine. And angelic. Forces. The man. The man. Saw. The mountain. Was full. Of horses. And chariots. Of fire. All. Around Elisha. All.

Around the church. Of God. All. Around it. All. Around. The church. And all. Around. Every.

[10 : 34] One. Of us. Who is a believer. We have. These horses. And chariots. Of fire. That doesn't prevent.

Things we don't understand. But still. This is what Elisha saw. Around him. Those horses. And chariots. Of fire.

All around. That's. The situation. And what can it mean. For us today. What horses. Around us. This morning.

As God's church. And God's. Individual children. We seem so frail. The opposition. Is so strong. What we see.

As opposition. Is strong. And what we don't see. Is even stronger. But. What. Are those. Forces. Which are for us. We. We ask at one level.

[11 : 30] Who's on the Lord's side. But we ask as well. Well. Who's on our side. And who's with us. And who are those. For us.

Who are more than those. Who are against us. Let me. Just for a moment. Itemize. What. Elisha. Elisha. Saw here. What we can see today.

Through God's word. And the eye of faith. What forces around. This congregation. And you as an individual. If your eyes are open.

What will you see. Around you. You will see. First of all. This. You will see. That Christ. Is around you.

He dwells. In our hearts. By faith. He says. I am with you. All the days. To the end. Of the age.

[12:27] When you gather. In my name. You are there. I cannot see him. From this pulpit. And I cannot touch him.

But I know he is at my shoulder. I know he fills this. Church. I feel often.

That he must be. Amused by my words. Because he falls so far short. Of what he knows. To be the truth. But he is here. And he is with us.

Every moment. Of our lives. He lives. In us. He dwells. Within us. He follows us.

As our shepherd. Every single step. Of the way. Remember the message. Of the great shepherd's time. Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd.

[13:25] The good shepherd. He is with us. In green pastures. In quiet. And still waters. On all the good days.

And you have seen this church. And your churches. You have seen. Many good days. You have heard great preaching.

You have heard good leadership. You have heard good. You have heard good. You have heard great preaching. You have heard good people. In this island ever knew. The Lord was with you.

In those good days. Of green pastures. And still waters. When your cup overflowed. He was with you.

and then in the valley of the shadow of death is he not there too in the darkness perhaps the darkness in which there is no light and yet in that darkness he is there this rod and his staff comfort me is there a sound of his going can I feel him it's time we learned you cannot feel the intangible you cannot see the invisible but he is there because he promised he is there in his promise he is with us this morning in our gathering and is with us in the valley of the shadow of death we remember this morning friends going through hard times and those caring for those in hard times they believed for him there is no earthly comfort but the Lord is with them by them in the valley of the shadow of death death but is with us in death and in dying death cannot separate us from the love of God how amazing is that he believes in me she'll never die and though she die yet shall she live believe us thou this do you believe this these great words and there he is this great shepherd of our sheep in every situation he's by our side that is with us the God of Bethel by whose hand his people still are fed and who through this weary pilgrimage are led day by day by him there is light even the darkness had we but eyes to see so believe today that he's so so near you within hearing distance and calling distance and good morning distance and SOS distance mayday distance every moment of our lives and then there's somebody else who's with us and that is

[17:22] God's Holy Spirit is with us the Spirit the Lord himself called the Spirit the Paraclete it's a Greek word but a very very simple word and it means somebody called in to help somebody called in to help and God the Father and Christ the Son have called in the Spirit to be your helper it's an official appointment he has a long list of clients of counselees and we are on that list he's been commissioned by God and God's Son to be with us to be so close to be beside us and with us and even indeed to be in us and what a mighty mighty force he is he said in

Genesis 1 and he breathes on the face of the water and the creation begins to teem with life because by the breath our Spirit of God the whole creation was given its form and this one who creates life and gives the universe form this one has been called in to help you and he saved by us every step of the way as our encourager and as our counsellor as our helper as our consoler and how sometimes we need consolation and he's in our hearts as an advocate for Christ and as a witness to

Christ and when we preach Christ and be witness to him as a congregation we don't do so alone but he goes with us and he convicts the world of sin and righteousness and judgment he is doing all these things he gives gifts to his church and sometimes in some ages and in some individuals gives very great gifts and then those gifts are withdrawn because they're sovereign but it's also the replacer of gifts and how we need today to cry to God Lord give us as a national church as a worldwide church as a congregation give us the gifts that we need to flourish and to bear witness to you and in your lives he bears fruit this spirit this person residing in you so close it's not it's not you you distinct from him and he from you and yet you couldn't be closer to any other being in the

universe than you are to this

Holy Spirit that amazing kind of intimacy between the believer and the Holy Spirit of God and he bears fruit love joy peace and so on Luther comments on that and he says you know when you say love you've said everything the fruit is love and the joy comes from love and the peace and the patience and long suffering but that's the fruit of the Spirit and like all fruit the tree bears that fruit by nature and how glorious it is when God's church bears that fruit the organism the tree by its very nature bears this fruit of love joy peace long suffering patience gentleness goodness faithfulness and so on how precious that is

I have words and lots of words sometimes but do I have fruit this life changing intimacy this engrafting into the saving power of our risen Christ and a poured out Holy Spirit so that's with us look around you what do you see what does faith see Christ with us all the days what is to see the Holy Spirit the comforter that power that enabler empower of Pentecost with us every moment of our journey and faith sees to God the Father go back to Isaiah 57 that great passage this is the Holy [23 : 22] One who inhabits eternity and he says but I also dwell but also with one who is of a contrite and humble spirit those who are lowly in heart and how glorious it is that this God who fills and transcends space and who fills and transcends time that this God dwells with us and it is so individual and so particular with the one with him with her also but it's a particular kind of person does he dwell in every human heart no but with those who are humble and contrite with those who are crushed by providence and crushed by mystery with those crushed above all by the dreadful journey into self knowledge

God has shown them themselves and they are poor in spirit and they mourn and they may eat and they have hope in nothing but in the mercy of God there is nothing more important in our Christian life than to maintain that crushedness that broken and contrite heart if we lose it and allow the entry of self confidence and self reliance and start saying I can manage then God have mercy on us that brokenness that crushingness in each one of us is the great condition

I use the word advisedly of the high and holy one dwelling in our heart God and self reliance God and self righteousness God and freedom from a sense of sin cannot live in the one heart do we think as we get older perhaps that self accusing conscience will become more tolerant and more kind and perhaps the law will speak to us less rigorously and less threateningly well less threateningly yes but not less rigorously oh lord thou hast researched and known how awesome is that and how awesome that a

God who has done so and conducted his own inquiry investigation should then cast his report his voluminous many many page report into the depths of the sea and say forgotten cancelled and so then Christ dwells with us and the spirit and God the father and that's three there's a huge army round Elisha and I mentioned three now I want to say this these three are one they are united in love for you each one loves you equally with equal passion and equal commitment and they have a common investment in your salvation and in seeing you safely home they hold you in the hollow of their hands of course our faith must cling to him our repentance must open the door and should faith ebb our contrition decline then the relationship of course is threatened but to all of us who have faith in

Christ this morning this is sure father son and holy spirit they all love you and they're all committed to seeing you safely home believe us though this it is to faith that those words are spoken and to faith those words are guaranteed but I want to add this the three is it only three yes it's three in a way but it is a remarkable three because it is the Lord our God and the one God is more than all the Assyrian army but I want to remind you if I may of something else of the angels whom we so often forget and neglect in early and age because that's what

[29 : 48] Elisha saw I'm sure he saw those horses and chariots of fire the chariots of the angels and you know it's intriguing because they weren't little creatures with wings and cherubic smiles like dolls with a smile but they were warriors angelic warriors and there were thousands and thousands of them the word here is not greater but more more are they who are for us than they are against us it's an arithmetical thing number number number more he's been told there are more angels on your side than there are warriors in the Syrian army these angels these angels were prominent in the life of

Christ they serve after his temptation in the desert angels minister tomb in Gethsemane an angel comforts them when Peter and John are in prison an angel opens prison doors for them in Revelation chapter 5 there's a mighty choir of angels who are singing worthy is the lamb that was

slain not for them but for the human race and when you who this morning are unconverted turn to God there will be a celebration among the angels that you are turned in repentance towards God because they are so interested in our human affairs and they are all around us be still for the presence of the Lord the Holy

One is here be still for the glory of the Lord is shining in this place be still because the power of the Lord is moving in this place we have this mighty army led by the triune God Father Son and Spirit and we have this what Hebrews calls this innumerable company of angels looking after us as a congregation and as individuals what then for us we must do our part and I want to turn very briefly to Hezekiah and that other chapter we read and what you know is this

Hezekiah tells his people that the one that was for them is greater than those against them and they might have said oh well in that case we can relax and leave it all to God and we can presume when our gifts and grace and our own wisdom and so on leave it to God because God is for us and he is greater than all our foes but what's intriguing is Hezekiah doesn't do that instead he goes and rebuilds the walls and fortifies this city and he clogs up all the wells and springs outside the city walls because why give the enemy an advantage and he orders them to make lots and lots of weapons and he says organize yourselves and are captains of this of companies here and everywhere so he builds fortifications he manufactures weapons he dumps up the wells and he organizes there's something for us to do yes

God is for us God is with us God is many and God is great but we must work out our own salvation just because God is with us and because God is for us you go and build your own fortifications and lay hold of your own weapons and you go organize yourselves and you make sure you don't give the enemy our advantage make sure that is true for us individuals it's also true of us as a congregation as a guy was a leader and he led them you are not vacant you have a great shepherd the great shepherd of the sheep and you have under shepherds and I'm charging them not to wait till the vacancy is over but here and now to follow a serious example build your fortifications prepare your weapons and organize yourselves

[35 : 54] David Steele once said to the Liberate Democratic Party at that conference go home and organize for government Thomas Schalmer said to the free church in 1843 organize organize organize that's what Zacchaeus did yes God is for us more and greater than all that's against us and yet we must build fortification nations we must find weapons we must organize ourselves and we must do it now organize not for secular government but organize for mission and for pastoral care and not least to educate our young people so that

Christ will hold them by their consciences and by the force of truth and then this go pray not go and pray Lord open his eyes but Lord open my eyes that I may see that I may see that I may see this great army of horses and chariots father son spirit angels on my side the real world we told often of that real world which we ministers don't seem to know but the real world is what Elisha saw that is reality around this church that are the father the son and the holy spirit and those innumerable angels if only we had eyes to see

Lord open our eyes that we may see and just one word more because the time has long since gone take courage Hezekiah's people they took courage I remember Martin Luther at a key moment of the reformation he was summoned before the emperor and his friend said to him Martin Martin don't go you cannot trust the emperor you cannot trust those Roman diplomats don't go they'll kill you they said to him more or less there are devils there for you're going and Martin Luther said to them though there were as many devils and worms the city he was to go to

Germany though there were as many devils as there are tiles on the roof I will go I will go because those with me are greater than those against me what I assure you there are more devils in point than there are slates on the roof and everywhere else the same story is through and yet more and greater are those who are for us and with us than those who are against us and so therefore let's take courage let's pray rug