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2 Kings 6:8–23

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3D VISION

SERIES: A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

The latest technology that is motivating you to replace your two-year-old flat panel television and boost the economy is 3D. Not only can you watch movies at the theatre in 3D, you can also watch them in your own home, provided of course that you have the right eyewear. The addition of a third dimension gives depth to the picture and thus allows you to see the picture realistically.

3D vision has its counterpart in the spiritual world. Like the current 3D technology, this counterpart adds another dimension of viewing that allows a person to see things realistically, to see the whole picture. It allows one not only to see the visible world but also the invisible world that is present with us but hidden from the naked human eye. Like 3D technology, one needs the right eyewear in order to view this new dimension; but unlike the current 3D technology, the spiritual counterpart has been around for a very long time. Our story in the Elisha narrative is proof of this fact.

Our text for this morning is found in 2 Kings 6. This will be our last study in the Elijah/Elisha narrative, and we conclude with another great story that will hopefully give us a new dimension for spiritual vision.

Israel and Aram at War

Now the king of Aram was at war with Israel. After conferring with his officers, he said, “I will set up my camp in such and such a place.” The man of God sent word to the king of Israel: “Beware of passing that place, because the Arameans are going down there.” So the king of Israel checked on the place indicated by the man of God. Time and again Elisha warned the king, so that he was on his guard in such places. (2 Kings 6:8–10 TNIV)

There are several things in the story about which we are uncertain, such as the identity of the kings. We assume that Israel’s king is Jehoram, son of Ahab and Jezebeel. The king of Aram is most likely Ben-Hadad II. Like last week, the names are not given because – compared to Elisha – these kings are not powerful or important.

We are also unsure of the timing, but it appears that things have deteriorated between Israel and Aram since the last chapter when Naaman, the Syrian army commander, came to Israel to find healing for his leprosy. Conflict between Aram and Israel happened frequently during this time and now these two countries are at odds once again. The king of Aram seems to be the aggressor.

Elisha sends warnings to Jehoram regarding the king of Aram’s movements. We are not certain how Elisha knew about the movements of the king of Aram. It may be due to an informant or perhaps, more likely, a revelation from God.

Elisha’s aid to the king is a contrast to Ahab and Jezebel who never consulted with Elijah. Even though Jehoram is better than his father and brother (3:1-3), Elisha warns him not because he is seeking the Lord, but because God has his own timing. Seemingly, Elisha is the true guardian of Israel and he warns Jehoram on several occasions,

not just once or twice. It happens so often that the king of Aram is outraged.

The King of Aram Discovers the Problem

This enraged the king of Aram. He summoned his officers and demanded of them, “Tell me! Which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?”

“None of us, my lord the king,” said one of his officers, “but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom.” (2 Kings 6:11–12)

The king of Aram is really bent out of shape; literally there is a “storm or gale in his heart.” He assumes there is a traitor and so calls together his “servants” and demands the traitor to identify himself. One servant tells the king that the problem is not with them but rather the culprit is Elisha who knows everything the king does and says. As we have seen elsewhere in the Elisha narrative, here again we read of a servant who has knowledge of the man of God that the king or person of high position does not have.

“Go, find out (see) where he is,” the king ordered, “so I can send men and capture him.”

The report came back: “He is in Dothan.”

Then he sent horses and chariots and a strong (great) force there. They went by night and surrounded the city. (2 Kings 6:13–14)

Elisha always knows where the king of Aram is located, but the king does not know where Elisha is. So the king sends out a search party and the report comes back that Elisha is in Dothan. Dothan is about eleven miles north of Samaria. The king of Aram then sends a large or heavy army to capture Elisha. He must think that Elisha is some sort of super spy like James Bond that warrants a huge force. The army arrives at night and surrounds the city.

Thus far the story is one of “sending.” Elisha sends to Jehoram, Jehoram sends to the place, now the king of Aram sends an army. For the first time we encounter the keyword in our text, the word “see.” It occurs six times. Elisha sees; the king of Aram does not. The stage is set, and now the action begins.

Elisha and His Servant Surrounded

When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city.

“Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?” the servant asked. (2 Kings 6:15)

The next morning Elisha’s servant rose early, put on the coffee, and went outside to get the morning paper. When he looked up he saw an alarming sight – a great army of horses and chariots surrounding the city. Immediately the servant went into panic mode. He ran back

inside, yelling at the top of his lungs, “Elisha, Elisha, what shall we do?” Two thoughts come to mind.

First, we all encounter overwhelming obstacles and enemies no matter how hard we try to avoid them. We can be serving the Lord like Elisha. We can be living according to God’s design. But our goodness and faithfulness does not guarantee comfort. In fact, it might be just the opposite. There are times when we will feel outnumbered and surrounded.

The enemy we face might be a person, someone with whom we have constant conflict, or an overpowering person who controls us in unhealthy ways. The enemy might be a tragic circumstance. We get the call in the middle of the night that a loved one has died. Our boss hands us a pink slip from out of the blue at the worst possible time. The doctor’s report comes back, and it is terminal. We face enemies of rejection, loneliness, depression, self-doubt, self-hatred, lust, addiction, or inadequacy. Of course, behind all these visible enemies is the one who “prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). We know him by the name Satan, the godfather of evil.

Second, our immediate reaction to the enemies we encounter is fear and panic. Like Elisha’s servant we cry out, “What shall we do?” We want to alleviate our fear and anxiety. We want to get out of harm’s way. We want immediate resolution. We jump at a course of action that will return us to comfortable and normal, and so like most animals in danger we either fight or we flee. My wife tells me that a small visible surprise like a plastic bag blowing on the ground can spook a powerful, 1000-pound horse. We are not much different.

Do you remember what Israel’s army said when they faced the giant Goliath? “On hearing the Philistine’s words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified” (1 Samuel 17:11). “Whenever the Israelites saw the man, they all fled from him in great fear” (1 Samuel 17:24).

I was listening the other night to an interview with the four New York Times journalists that were captured, bound, and beaten by the Libyans. One of the journalists was a woman and she said that while she was blindfolded one of the soldiers tenderly rubbed her face and told her that tonight she was going to die. That is a fearful situation. But the woman said that her greatest fear was to be separated from her friends and be alone. Perhaps that is our worst fear – to face a menacing beast and be all alone.

Elisha Prays and His Servant Sees

“Don’t be afraid,” the prophet answered. “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”

And Elisha prayed, “Open his eyes, LORD, so that he may see.” Then the LORD opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. (2 Kings 6:16–17)

Elisha very calmly responded by telling his servant to settle down and not be afraid. Why? Elisha knew an incredible spiritual truth: there were more on his side than on theirs. And then Elisha prayed for his servant’s eyes to be opened, the first of three prayers in our text. The Lord answered Elisha’s prayer and the servant’s eyes were opened and he saw horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. Fire is a symbol for the presence of God.

When the servant first went outside all he could see was the army circling the city. Now he saw what was actually true. He had 3D

vision. In between Elisha and the army were horses and chariots of fire encircling Elisha. Elisha saw the horses and chariots of fire when Elijah ascended to heaven (2:11). Now the servant sees the same reality. Again, a couple of thoughts come to mind.

First, though our enemies loom large and are foreboding, we are never alone. God’s forces are everywhere around us. There are more with us than with them.

Eugene Peterson writes: “...first impressions and surface appearances, are deceiving. We underestimate God and we overestimate evil. We don’t see what God is doing and conclude that he is doing nothing. We see everything that evil is doing and think it is in control of everyone.”¹

At times when the physical circumstances seem overwhelming and fearful we need to be reminded of the truth that all is not what it appears. We are protected and buffeted by the armies of God. This is the truth that will allow us to have confidence and courage in the midst of pressure and panic. The psalmist writes:

“The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands;” (Psalms 68:17)

“The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.” (Psalms 34:7)

Second, rather than looking at the physical circumstances, we pray for spiritual vision. We pray for 3D vision to see the invisible realities. This is what Paul prays for the Ephesians when he prays for the eyes of their hearts to be enlightened (Ephesians 1:18). We ask what Bartimaeus asked of the Lord: “Rabbi, I want to see” (Mark 10:51). We pray Elisha’s prayer: “Lord, open my eyes.”

One of my greatest memories growing up in Nebraska was pheasant hunting with my dad. We would get up early, drive into the country, have a great breakfast, and be ready to walk the fields by the crack of dawn. Often while we would drive the country roads looking for good places to hunt, I would hear my dad say, “Uh, oh” and he would slowly bring the car to a stop. I knew what that meant. He had spotted a rooster on the side of the road. My dad had an uncanny ability to see a little head pop up as we drove by. I was always amazed because I would never see it. But my dad had eyes to see.

This is what we need; we need spiritual eyes to see the presence of God, and this comes through prayer. We need training in using the 3D lenses of the Holy Spirit. Prayer cleanses the lamp of our body so that we are filled with light. We look not at what is seen, but what is unseen (2 Cor. 4:18).

“Earth’s crammed with heaven,

And every common bush afire with God,

But only he who sees takes off his shoes;

The rest sit round and pick blackberries.”²

Sometimes God does not grant us the ability to see or to grasp the full dimension of what is happening. What do we do then? We continue to walk by what we know to be true, we walk by faith not by sight, trusting that nothing can happen outside of God’s control or will.

In John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, Christian approaches the Palace Beautiful. A short distance away from the porter’s lodge Christian enters a very narrow passage and then spies up ahead two lions in the way. Then Bunyan adds, “The lions were chained; but he saw not the chains.’ Sometimes we see the chains that hold

the enemy in check. But sometimes we just have to know and believe that God has it all under control.³

The Enemy Disarmed

As the enemy came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, “Strike this army with blindness.” So he struck them with blindness, as Elisha had asked.

Elisha told them, “This is not the road and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will lead you to the man you are looking for.” And he led them to Samaria. (2 Kings 6:18–19)

As the Aramean soldiers approached Elisha and his servant, Elisha prays for a second time. He prays for them to become blind and for a second time God answers his request. We are uncertain if the soldiers were truly blinded or whether the blindness was a dazed condition that made them confused as to where they were and whom they were with. Elisha led the great army for the eleven-mile trek back to Samaria.

The servant was blind but then gained sight. The soldiers could see but then became blind. I am reminded of what Jesus said after he healed the blind man in John 9, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind” (John 9:39).

God is the god of great reversals. We saw this in the story of Naaman and Gehazi last week. God brings salvation and deliverance in unexpected ways, ways that defy explanation or understanding. When Elisha prayed, the enemy was rendered ineffective, helpless and powerless. In the same way our enemies can be rendered ineffective through our prayers. The things that cause fear and anxiety can be disarmed and can lose their power over us through God’s grace, even if the circumstances do not change.

In her book, *The Hiding Place*, Corrie Ten Boom illustrates this truth by telling the story of trying to sneak a Bible into the prison camp at Ravensbruck:

It made a bulge you could have seen across the Grote Markt. I flattened it out as best I could, pushing it down, tugging the sweater around my waist, but there was no real concealing it beneath the thin cotton dress. And all the while I had the incredible feeling that it didn’t matter, that this was not my business, but God’s. That all I had to do was walk straight ahead.

As we trooped back out through the shower room door, the S.S. men ran their hands over every prisoner, front, back, and sides. The woman ahead of me was searched three times. Behind me, Betsie was searched. No hand touched me.

At the exit door to the building was a second ordeal, a line of women guards examining each prisoner again. I slowed down as I reached them but the *Aufseherin* in charge shoved me roughly by the shoulder. ‘Move along! You’re holding up the line!’

And so Betsie and I arrived at Barracks 8 in the small hours of that morning, bringing not only the Bible, but a new knowledge of the power of Him whose story it was.⁴

“If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31) But what if it appears that the enemy has won and we have lost? Then we identify with our Lord who told Peter after he cut off the soldier’s ear in the garden: “Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:53) God’s will for Jesus was the cross and sometimes that is God’s will for us as well. He has greater purposes in mind that

we might not be aware of. We have to remember that the cross may have looked like defeat, but in the end it was the ultimate victory. The cross was the victory over the ultimate enemies of sin and death.

A Great Feast

Elisha is victorious but like our study last week we get a surprise ending.

“After they entered the city, Elisha said, “LORD, open the eyes of these men so they can see.” Then the LORD opened their eyes and they looked, and there they were, inside Samaria.

When the king of Israel saw them, he asked Elisha, “Shall I kill them, my father? Shall I kill them?”

“Do not kill them,” he answered. “Would you kill those you have captured with your own sword or bow?” (2 Kings 6:20–22)

Now the hunters are the prisoners of the king of Israel. For a third time Elisha prays and for a third time God grants his request. The enemy soldiers are given back their sight. The king asks Elisha if he should kill them. The word for “kill” is the same word for “strike/struck” in verse 18. Perhaps Jehoram does not want to make the same mistake as his father Ahab when he made a covenant with the king of Aram rather than kill him (1 Kings 20). Elisha suggests that in normal war the king would not kill the prisoners, so certainly not now in this case when God has given them into his hands. The prisoners do not belong to the king but to Yahweh. Elisha suggests a different response.

“Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink and then go back to their master.”

So he prepared a great feast for them, and after they had finished eating and drinking, he sent them away, and they returned to their master. So the bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel’s territory. (2 Kings 6:22–23)

Rather than kill the prisoners, the king prepared a great feast. We had a great woman in chapter 4, a great man in chapter 5, and now we have a great feast. The soldiers ate and drank and then returned home. The story ends with a fourth “sending.” The result was that the marauding bands of Arameans didn’t come into the land of Israel again.

We would have written the story differently. We would expect the Aramean prisoners to be killed or at least to be jailed. But instead we see the opposite. They are treated to a feast. Instead of hostility and brutality, they are shown grace and kindness. The effect is to disarm the conflict and bring peace.

This is not our way, but it is the Jesus way. When God gives us victory or vindicates us in some way, the temptation is to hit the enemy while he is down, to get even, to get our revenge. However, Elisha encourages us to respond with grace and kindness towards others. When we gain strength and confidence through the knowledge of God’s presence, then we are free to love those who would hurt us. We offer bread to friend and foe alike. As a result we can diffuse difficult situations, bring peace, and even cause others to repent of wrongdoing. In the end we might win an enemy to the Lord.

Paul writes: “Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord. On the contrary: ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you

will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:19-21).

"In the 1970s many Christians in China were worshipping in house churches. Their meeting places were constantly being changed in order to avoid crackdowns. Leaders would be arrested and sent to labor camps. At one particular meeting those present had a very strong sense of Christ's love and the Spirit's presence. At the end of the meeting five visitors stood and announced they had been sent to make arrests. Now they too wanted to believe."⁵ Our willingness to love our enemy can have dramatic results.

The key word in our text is the word "see." The miracle of Elisha giving sight to his servant links us to Jesus giving sight to the blind in the gospels. The sign points us to a spiritual reality that applies to all of us. Through the miracle of becoming a new creation through Christ, we are given spiritual sight. We can see how God is working in the ordinary events of the day, in our relationships, and in the up and down events of life. We become sensitive to the hidden works of God. We are able to bridge the gap between the physical and the spiritual.

Let me digress for a moment. The last three studies in Elisha have an amazing connection to Jesus in gospels. In the last three weeks we have seen the dead raised to life, the leper cleansed, and the blind given sight. When John sent to Jesus asking if he was the expected One, Jesus responded by saying: "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor" (Matthew 11:4-5). Jesus did what Elisha did and this authenticated him as the Messiah. Israel should have recognized what was going on. When Jesus sent out the twelve he told them: "As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give'" (Matthew 10:7-8). The disciples did what they saw Jesus doing. These physical miracles point to universal spiritual healing available to all. This is what Jesus does in us. This is our ministry to the world.

Now, back to seeing. The ability to see the unseen world is a mark of spiritual maturity. The obstacles and difficulties we face might loom large and dark. The enemy might seem to outman and outnumber us. We might feel like we are no match for our foes. "Like Elisha's servant we cry out in alarm and complaint to God. But He gives us insight - the vision He showed the prophet of greater armies still, of the armies of the Lord in bright shining armor surrounding the dark and dangerous hosts of evil. We are not alone."⁶

The means to see the unseen is prayer. Rather than responding in panic and alarm, or living in fear and anxiety, we learn to be quiet and look past the visible to see how God is working. Thelma Hall tells us to "'meditate' on life by living reflectively rather than on the surface of things: 'listening to life' and recognizing how God is there, as he is in all creation and people and events of our ordinary everyday lives. To grow in this realization, a very helpful practice is to take some time before the end of each day to reflect and prayerfully discern how God was present and acting, perhaps disguised as commonplace, in moments that passed us by or in circumstances that seemed to conceal rather than reveal him. For the truth is that we are immersed in God, receiving from him life and being and love at every moment, as constantly as the air we breathe throughout our lives. What remains is to open our inner eye and see what is always there, to grow in our awareness of this deepest reality."⁷

Now to the God who raises the dead, cleanses the leper, and give sight to the blind be honor and power and glory forever. Amen

1. Eugene Peterson, *Run With The Horses: The Quest for Life at its Best*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity 1983).
2. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*.
3. Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Kings* (Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2005), 115.
4. Corrie ten Boom, *The Hiding Place*, (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1971).
5. Davis, *2 Kings*, 113.
6. David Roper, *Seasoned with Salt*, (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 2004), 105.
7. Thelma Hall, *Too Deep For Words* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 53-54.

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