

## 2 Kings 6:8-23

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[ 0 : 00 ] Turn back to two kings with me. As one last hurrah, I wanted to have one more sermon.! Of course, let me have one more sermon in two kings, which we've been looking at, haven't we, earlier in the year. And in this really encouraging passage, I think there's one message that I certainly need to hear and that you need to hear tonight, is that no one is as safe as the people of the Lord, as the Lord's people. No one is as safe as the people of the Lord.

But the one who is with us is greater than the enemies that we fear. That's what Elisha says to his servant in verse 16, isn't it? He says, those who are with us are more than those who are with them, the enemy. And the servant has his eyes open to see the vast armies of the Lord who surround and protect them from the dangers that lurk in the darkness.

The psalmist says that the Lord protects and surrounds his people as the mountains surround Jerusalem. He is our protection. And so no one is as safe tonight as the people of the Lord. And you'll see throughout this passage, a theme that features in that safe theme, that the Lord protects through the man of God, Elisha, the man of God's ability to see things that are hidden. And also to give sight and to remove sight from those who choose this. Elisha is able to see the hidden strategies of the enemy. He's able to open the eyes of his servant to see the hidden power of God. And then he blinds the enemy and opens their eyes again at the end. And so the Lord's protection for his people comes through his supreme power to see all. And to give sight or to remove sight. That's the big theme here. I've got two headings for you tonight. First of all, the Lord's all-seeing protection. The Lord's all-seeing protection.

So if we come back to the narrative, we're back in Israel, in the northern kingdom. And God's people are under threat again, aren't they? If you look at verse 8, the king of Syria this time was warring against Israel. So the people of God are in danger. They have something to fear. They have an enemy who is against them, an enemy who is determined to bring harm upon them. He is an enemy who strategises and makes plans to do that. If you look at verse 8 again, he takes counsel, doesn't he, with his servants in the war room, with the maps and the charts on the table. He makes military strategy against Israel. And he says, at such and such a place shall be my camp. He decides where he's going to attack. So the enemy is intelligent and focused and commanding. He is knowledgeable and he is dangerous. But there is a great problem, isn't there? There's a problem for him. Because no matter how intelligent and no matter how dangerous he is, no matter where he stages his assaults, he cannot touch God's people. It's really, really strange. It just doesn't add up. No matter what ingenious plan he comes up with, it just doesn't work, does it? The Israelite army is always one step ahead for some reason.

[ 3 : 52 ] So the obvious conclusion for him is that there is a mole in the intelligence agency. Someone is leaking information from Syria to the Israelites somehow. And you can sense the frustration for him when he slams his fist on the table, verse 11, will you not show me who of us is for the king of Israel? There can be no other explanation. No other way the highly classified military information is going into Israelite hands without a spy in our midst. There must be a leak.

But one of his advisors knows what's really going on in verse 12. No, my lord of the king, it's not one of us, but it's Elisha, the prophet in Israel. He tells the king of Israel the words that you speak. And we the readers already know it too, don't we, in verse 9. Elisha, the man of God, sent word to the king of Israel, beware of going to this place for the Syrians and the man of Israel. And he says, it's the man of Israel. And he says, it's the man of God who sees all. It's the Lord's all-seeing protection. And notice the clearance level, the access that he has to all the levels of information in the enemy's camp. The servant says, he tells the king of Israel, the words that you speak even in your bedroom. Even at the very heart of the enemy's council, the most secretive of his plans and thoughts are being intercepted constantly and being relayed back to the king of Israel. The man of God hears the

most intimate words and thoughts of the enemy. And so God's people are protected from the danger because God sees all. And there's so much power that the enemy has, isn't there, with plans and strategies, and yet there's no success. Syria at the time was the world's superpower, but none were safer than God's people. There's a kind of comical feel to the narrative. It's kind of ironic how the enemy's response is to try and catch the one who has helped Israel evade capture. He wants to try and get Elijah, doesn't he? Now he knows the scheme, but he's desperate. He's got all of the power, but he's got no success. It's like one of those

Jeeps you see in the mud on TV, you know, those programs, guys traveling across the world in ridiculous cars. And one of their four by fours gets stuck in the mud, doesn't it? And it's got all the power. It's a big V8, but it's got no traction. It revs and it spins, but it can't go anywhere. And he plots and he schemes, but the Lord, he sits in the heavens and laughs.

Because he sees it all. Isn't that the pattern that you see throughout the whole of the Bible story? God's all-seeing protection for his people. The enemies of God's people look like they have all the power, but God sees all. Do you remember Pharaoh? All the power, but no traction. God sees all. And Pharaoh's chariot are led into the perfect trap. They're swept away in the waters. Or do you remember the Midianites or the Amalekites? All the power, but no traction. God sees their camp in the dark at night and he sends in Gideon just at the right time that we could go on, couldn't we? Do you remember King Herod? All the power, but no traction. God sees all. And he leads our saviour to Egypt to escape. God sees all his desires, all his schemes. He sits in the heavens and laughs. And he protects his people by disclosing his wisdom and his understanding of the enemies and his people. He is the revealer of mysteries, as Daniel calls him. He says to King Nebuchadnezzar, my God is the only God and he knows what is in the darkness. And the light that he's in the darkness. And the light dwells with him. So he warns us of his, of the enemy's strategies. He tells us of his plans. And he frustrates his success. And even the things that he doesn't reveal to us, he knows them too, doesn't he? And that is enough. So no one can touch or harm God's people unless the all-seeing protector allows, or prays him for the harm that he's not allowed the enemy to inflict against his people. His all-seeing protection. But secondly this evening, we have as well our fears of the unseen, or our unseeing fears. His all-seeing protection.

Then on the other hand, there is our fear of the unseen, or of the unknown. Isn't it a great encouragement tonight to hear this truth of God's all-seeing power?

[ 9 : 39 ] And I say to you again, that there are no people in the world that are safer than God's people. And you can know that to be true, can't you? But knowing that truth, and seeing that truth, are two very different things, aren't they?

I love to hear that God protects, but can I see that? Am I very conscious of it in my life?

And that is the problem that Elisha's servant has in the story, isn't it? When hearing about God's protection is slightly different from seeing it. So Elisha and his servants are in this place, Dothan, and the enemy, in another scene, finds them and surrounds them with horses and chariots and a great army.

They come by night to surround the city. They're in the dark, aren't they? And Elisha's servant needs help in seeing in this dark situation.

He's not noticed the enemy come in during the night. And then he gets the shock of his life as he walks out the front door the next morning to get the morning paper and the breakfast. Verse 15, he kind of does a double take, doesn't he?

[ 10 : 52 ] Looks around and behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And he says, alas, my master, what should we do? And Elisha lets him hear the truth.

Verse 16, do not be afraid, For those who are with us are more than those who will wait then. The Lord surrounds his people like the mountains surrounding Jerusalem, my boy.

The armies of the Lord are more vast than the enemy, my boy. He gets to hear about the God who protects, whose power outmatches and outmasses the enemy, the all-seeing protector.

But the problem of the fear isn't just in the realm of being told things, is it? He has to be shown. So Elisha prays for his servant, verse 17, Lord, open his eyes that he may see.

It is one thing to be told the truth of God's power, isn't it? To know the facts of the matter, to know the doctrine, which is wonderful. But it's another to be consciously and vividly impressed by the reality of his power, protecting you.

[ 12 : 12 ] It's one thing to hear, and it's another thing to see as you hear. And to be convinced and to be held by what you hear, and to take courage from it.

To be vividly shown God's power. And how we often need that, don't we? We really need that. In the book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, by John Bunyan, there's a moment when Christian, the main character, he's on a journey, and he goes through a very narrow passage, at a distance from a lodge that he can see, where he wants to go and get some rest.

And Bunyan tells the story, he says, looking very narrowly before him as he went, he saw two lions in the way on this narrow cottage. Now thought he, I see the dangers that mistrust and Tiberus were driven back by.

They're two characters that he'd seen going the other way, earlier in the story. Then he was afraid, and thought also himself to go back after them.

But Bunyan adds subtly in brackets, the lions were chained, but he saw not the chains. He saw nothing but death before him.

[ 13 : 35 ] He couldn't see the chains. And Elisha's son couldn't see the vast power of the armies of the Lord. He couldn't see what God could see until his eyes were opened.

And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. But we sympathise with him, don't we, very much?

We are afraid. Even though we've heard about, we know about God's all-seeing protection, but perhaps we've not seen it, or we've not come to realise it, really.

Like Christian, we would love to see the chains that bind the lion. We would love to see the law of hosts at our side.

So how do we do that? Where do we see the chains and the armies of the Lord? Well, I think there's a clue in the passage here. Did you see the way that it's described for us?

[ 14 : 42 ] The servant sees the armies of the Lord on the mountains, but look carefully at verse 17. Where are they? All around Elisha.

It's funny that, isn't it? He adds that, all around Elisha. And that is really important, because at the centre of the hordes of God's army is the man of God.

At the centre of God's awesome power, there he is. The one who sees all. The one who opens the eyes of the blind.

It's funny, the servant wouldn't be in this mess at all, would he? Had he not been serving Elisha in the first place, he wouldn't be in Dothan.

He'd probably be somewhere else, out of harm's way. He's just like the disciples, who were with Jesus in the boat. There would be no stall for them, had they just stayed on the land, apart from him.

[ 15 : 42 ] Those who follow Jesus are sure to be in trouble, aren't they? Sooner or later. But the protection and rescue power is bestowed upon and surrounds him for the benefit of those who serve him, the man of God.

And Jesus is the one who has the power to open our eyes to see that. Where do we go then to see the chains that bind the lion? Well, we are to look no further than Jesus Christ himself.

God's power in flesh. And we're not just told about God's protective power, we see him. And we see him binding the enemy.

In his own words, binding the strong man. We go to the pages of the Gospels, we witness the salvation of God for his people. We see him, don't we, swinging the chains.

We see him casting out demons with a word. We see him pushing back the powers and dominions of evil. We see him conquering sin and death. Banishing demons with a word.

[ 17 : 03 ] Restoring and healing the oppressed and the poor and the fearful. We see our rock. And as someone said, the waves crash against him but he cannot be moved.

The man of God cannot be moved. One who is surrounded by legions of unseen angels. Says to one of his disciples, doesn't he?

He grabs a sword at one point to defend Jesus, to stop the crucifixion. He says, don't you think I can appeal to my father and he will once send me more than 12 legions of angels?

How should the scriptures be fulfilled if I were to do that? The resources are there. The power is there. But it's not activated.

It's not activated for a better reason. Is there? You can imagine that the legions, the hosts of heaven on red alert, the fiery chariots of two king's six, chomping at the bit to ride out and intervene for their captain and their master, the Lord Jesus.

[18:10] But the cross was his will. He has a better reason not to call them in. And he's saying to his disciples there, isn't he, I'm not suffering here because I'm under-resourced.

You're not suffering because I haven't got the means to send millions of awesome angels to get you out of this. Of course I have. But there is a better reason.

He is the one who commands the wind and the waves. He's the one who summons life from the tomb. who speaks to a dead child as if he was waking him up from an afternoon nap.

The one who banishes evil, the one who casts out fear. And if we see him like that in the Gospels, in his humiliated state, in his state before resurrection and glory, if we see him commanding the wind and the waves here, how much more does he command the storms of our life now?

how much more power has the Father endowed on him in his early bright glory, exalted on the throne in resurrection glory?

[19:25] That's why the Apostle John, if he takes the words of Elisha and applies them to Jesus himself, do you remember 1 John 4, verse 4, instead of saying, those who are with us are greater than those who are with them, he says, he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

The power rests in him, knowing him. The armies surround not just the man of God, but the God-man. They are his armies.

So look at him. See him. Study him. And you will see the chains, the chains that bind the evils that you most fear for this coming year.

You might come back to me and say, well, is that really the same? See what you've done there. Is that the same? I mean, Elisha's servant saw something that was physical, didn't he, on the mountains around him.

He had a tangible vision of God's power. So why can't I have that? Then I won't be afraid if I could see something physical. But I want you to realise that the opening and closing of eyes in this passage is more than physical.

[20:48] To be able to see the chains that bind the lion requires a sight that is more than physical sight. I'm not saying that what the servant here saw wasn't real, like it was a mirage or something in his imagination.

It was real. But we're being taught here not to be naive about the kind of vision we should ask for. To understand that sight means more than seeing visions and visible manifestations of God's power.

The narrative actually tells us what true sight really involves. As it shows us what the opposite looks like. We understand the presence of true sight, what we're to ask for, with an example of its absence.

And we get that with what happens to the Syrian army as they get around it. Elisha had just prayed, hadn't he, for his son, opened his eyes so he could see.

But then, later he prayed to the opposite for the enemy, verse 18. When the Syrians came down against him, Elisha prayed to the Lord and said, Lord, please strike this people with blindness.

[22:03] And Elisha then marches the enemy on a ten mile hike to Samaria into the heart of God's country, into the heart of their most, the place they don't want to be, isn't it?

Okay, it's nighttime, it's dark, but what is obvious here is that their blindness, the blindness that God inflicts them with is not so much physical, that they can see well enough to organize a mass march ten miles to Samaria.

After they've been blinded, Elisha says to them, this is not the way and this is not the city, follow me and I'll bring you to the man you seek. It's like something about Star Wars, isn't it?

These are not the droids you're looking for. It looks like some sort of Jedi mind trick. It's a blindness that is not about the loss of physical eyesight.

It's a blindness that's more about perceptual confusion so that the man they seek leads them to the man that they're seeking, which is him, but they don't see him.

[23:16] It is a removal, a discernment, isn't it? Of who is who and what is what. The word blindness here is only used one other time in the Bible when in Genesis 19 the men of Sodom are mobs outside Lot's door, if you remember that story.

It's a really grisly episode, isn't it? I've attempted gang rape. But the angels with Lot strike the mob with blindness so that they wear themselves out scraping at the door.

It's the affliction of confusion, of absurdity to be made senseless and silly to lose discernment. And so the God who sees all is the one who rescues and reassures by giving spiritual sight to his

servants.

It's not just physical sight, but a spiritual understanding. He brings confusion on their enemies, but understanding for his people. He's able to bring the counsel of the nations to nothing and the discernment of the discerning he brings and thwarts to bring something.

He confuses and muddles the thinking and perceptions of those who seek to hurt God's kingdom but he brings revelation and clarity and illumination to his people to see what it was.

[ 24 : 44 ] And so to be able to see the chains we need to see Jesus and we need to ask him to open our eyes and to be able to spiritually discern who he is with spiritual perception to ask the God who reveals mysteries to see centered on him the unseen protection that God provides to gaze at Jesus and to see him again to ask for his help in doing that.

And he's gracious in doing that even for those who deserve to be blind to him. So let me touch at the end of the passage where after the Syrian army is brought to Samaria they are now the ones in danger of God's wrath and Elisha mercifully opens their eyes and he shows mercy to the blind who have willingly refused to see before and feeds them and quenches their thirst and sends them away when he could have destroyed them.

So here is our God who sees all and who is able to both open and close our eyes to see his power even if we deserve to stay blind. He opens our eyes to see the Lord Jesus.

Now let me close with the story. There's a tribe in a place far away a long time ago who had a funny way of training their young boys to fight and hunt.

So after learning the skills a boy on his 13th birthday would be put to one final test. He was blindfolded, he was taken to a dark index forest.

[ 26 : 31 ] miles away to spend the night alone. He'd never been away from home before. And he takes off the blindfold and he's in the middle of this forest alone with his terraples.

Every twig that snaps, every rustle of leaves, he imagines it's a predator coming to get him. But as the dawn appears, sunlight breaks into the darkness.

He looks around, he sees flowers and trees and a pathway that had always been there throughout the night. And then through a clearing in the trees, he catches the outline of a figure of a man standing only a few feet away.

On this test, his father had been there the whole time. He'd been there all along, protecting in the darkness with a rod and a staff in his hands.

It is the unseen protection of the all-seeing God, isn't it? I can't think of a better thing to say to you than to commend you to him tonight.

[ 27 : 43 ] Jesus Christ and his magnificent saving power. God, what you need and what I need most of all is by the power of the Holy Spirit, is for my eyes, for your eyes to be opened to him and to fill your vision with him this next year so that you can know that no people are as safe as the Lord's people and he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

Let's pray. Let's pray.