

“May God Open Your Eyes”

May 6, 2019

2 Kings 6:15-17

A Sermon by Pastor Justin Heise

לֹא־אֵירָא מִרְבָּבוֹת עִם אֲשֶׁר סָבִיב שְׁתוּ עָלַי:¹

I know those words don't mean much to you. You were probably thinking, “I hope this isn't going to be one of *those* kinds of sermons.” And it won't be. I think that those are wonderfully comforting words, especially concerning what we are going to talk about today. I think that loneliness is one of the defining characteristics of our time. Last year a survey was done of 20,000 adults, which isn't necessarily a very large group of people, but even within that group, 54% said they almost always felt lonely.² That study also revealed that even when people are surrounded by others, they feel like the people aren't actually *there*. They're physically present, but not engaged. Perhaps even more striking is the fact that this problem isn't getting better. The study also found that the younger the person, the more lonely they are. This isn't a sermon about loneliness. But, I think that loneliness is something that truly affects Christians, and something that maybe confuses them more than anything else.

If you are a Christian, doesn't it make sense that you should never feel lonely? You know that Jesus has promised you, “**Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age**” (Matthew 28:20). Amen? End of the sermon? Does that solve the problem? Not at all. In fact, I think that it makes the problem worse for some people. They hear that Jesus is with them, but they don't feel it, understand it, grasp it, maybe even believe it. It leads to *worse* feelings of isolation. Not only do they feel lonely, but now there's something wrong with them as a Christian. They might think, “Everyone else can sense God's presence, but not me.” And it leads them to despair. I said before that this isn't a sermon about loneliness, and it isn't. Loneliness is just one example of how this works. What if someone feels guilty about something they have done, and they know God's promise. He says, “**If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness**” (1 John 1:9). But, they don't feel forgiven. The burden doesn't feel any lighter. Or, what if a parent raises their child up to know Jesus, trusting in his Word: “**Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it**” (Proverbs 22:6)? Then their child goes off to college and their faith isn't so important.

Can you sense what I am getting at? This is what Elisha's servant is struggling with in the lesson today from 2 Kings 6. The prophet Elisha has spent his ministry directing messages from God to whomever he sends them. Often, this turned out to be the king of Israel, and sometimes he would give him behind the scenes

information about enemy troop movements. So, if the king was planning to travel somewhere, or send his army somewhere, Elisha could tell them where there was or was not enemies. It's one way that God was protecting his people. But, if you were from an enemy nation, it was *so* frustrating. So, the king of Aram finally decided that someone had betrayed him. But, his troops tell him that's it's Elisha—Elisha tells the king of Israel “**the very words you speak in your bedroom**” (2 Kings 6:12). The King of Aram plans revenge, he surrounds the city where Elisha is, and that is where our story picks up.

“**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). Can you sense the issue here? Elisha and his servant had delivered messages to protect God's people over and over. That's what God does. He protects his people. The servant was trusting in a promise like that: “**The Lord protects and preserves them—they are counted among the blessed in the land—he does not give them over to the desire of their foes**” (Psalm 41:2). So what should he think when there's an army camped around his city in the morning? Doesn't it seem to him like God has forsaken his promise? Doesn't it seem like the God, who would protect his people, has failed to protect them?

This is one of the hardest things about being a Christian. Whether we are talking about loneliness, forgiveness, raising children, or facing an army at your doorstep, God gives us his promises, and he doesn't always seem to keep them. And then, what does that mean for some of the biggest promises God has made. What if God doesn't seem to keep them? Because that's exactly how it seems. Can you scientifically test whether God actually parted the Red Sea? Can you go back in time and be there the moment that stone rolled back from the empty tomb? What if God promised to come back for us, but now it's been 2000 years? This is not just a problem with some of God's promises, but all of them. What do you do if you it doesn't seem like God keeps them? All Christian must wrestle with this problem, otherwise we'll end up broadsided by something.

But, here's the thing. We are starting in the wrong place. In the world, scientists make guess based on evidence and try to confirm their guesses, but not in Christianity. God doesn't tell us to do experiments with our faith. There is no answer to your loneliness behind the scientific method, or to your forgiveness behind some hypothesis, or whatever. God doesn't give us a book

¹ Transliterated: *Lo ira merivivot am asher saviv shatul alai*. Also, Hebrew is read from right to left—backwards.

² Found here: <http://fortune.com/2018/05/01/americans-lonely-cigna-study/>

of science experiments. He gives us a book of promises. God does not want to give you *proof*. He wants to give to you *trust*. That is the key concept here, and it's the difference between Elisha and his servant: **“Don't be afraid,' the prophet answered. 'Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.' And Elisha prayed, 'O LORD, open his eyes so 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”** (1 Kings 6:16-17).

Now, I know what you're thinking. I just told you that God doesn't care so much about giving us proof, as he does about giving us trust. But, you're thinking, “Well, how come Elisha's servant got to see proof of all the angels around them?” It's a really good question, but *what the servant saw was not about proof*. Yes, his eyes were opened and he got to see angels, that's great and all, but what about the army? Was God going to send all of those angels out to fight the army and destroy them? No. Not at all. This wasn't about showing the servant how he was going to win the battle. He was just showing him that he *could* win the battle. But that wasn't how he did it. When the army charged, Elisha asked God to strike the people blind. Almost like the blindness taken from the servant was given to the whole army. Unable to see, they scrambled to find their way. Unable to see to whom they were listening, Elisha led the army into the city of Samaria and they were captured by the army there.

God didn't need all of the angels that he had at his disposal. He used just one ordinary man. The servant saw those angels, not as proof that God would win the battle, but in order to take away his fear, in other words, to help him trust. Many Christians are looking for evidence. They want to see the proof behind what the Bible teaches. Some even think they have that, but it isn't the point. God doesn't really give us proof. It's just not about that. Instead, God gives us what we need to take away our fear, to build up our trust. Because at some point you realize that, no matter how much evidence you would see, it would never really be enough. God knows that, too. So, he takes us in the other direction. He brings us to trust him so that no matter what the evidence says, it would never be too little.

So, how does this help with loneliness? How does this help with forgiveness? How does this help when your child is wandering away from the faith—or whatever else the situation might entail? What does this have to do with the weird Hebrew stuff I said at the beginning of my sermon? My friends, faith is trust. It is not so much about having the facts, as it is about knowing that *the one who promised is faithful* (Hebrews 10:23). He has never once abandoned one of his Word. They have never fallen to the ground. When God doesn't give you proof for his Word, which is going to be most of the time, still trust him.

God didn't need his angels or a mighty army to conquer your heart. He needed something ordinary like human language or

the water of baptism. Then, your spiritual blindness was taken away. Your heart was conquered by God, even though it may doubt, even though it may not see proof, even though it may not always feel the way you thought it should. God has opened your eyes so that you can see the spiritual reality around you. I don't mean that you can see chariots and horses, I meant that you trust his promises. Friends, this is true faith: God has resurrected your heart through the message of Christ's resurrection, and now, even in the face of your mind's objections or any fears, it trusts and hopes in that message. Do we see proof? No, but we have the Word which crushes doubt. Are we sometimes afraid? Yes, but God gives us perfect love that drives out all fear.

We've talked a lot about the servant, but I want to finish by talking about Elisha. When he was surrounded by an army, and his servant comes in freaking out, convinced they're doomed, what did Elisha do? It seems like he doesn't even think about himself. He just focuses on his friend. He says a prayer for him. He asks that his eyes be opened. But, what about Elisha? He didn't see the chariots or the horses. He didn't want proof. He trusted that God would deliver him from that situation in whatever way that he would. Could he deliver him by destroying the approaching army with a band of angels? Sure. Could he hide Elisha away somewhere so they couldn't find him? Sure. Could God allow Elisha to die and deliver him from the enemy into heaven's paradise that way? Of course. In the face of whatever came his way, Elisha trusted God. May God open your eyes, too.

So what was the Hebrew I said at the beginning? It's from Psalm 3:6, **“I will not fear though tens of thousands rise up against me on every side.”** It's a prayer of trust, that even if I would be surrounded by more than 10,000 soldiers, and the odds seem awful, and every human hope seems lost, I will not be afraid. God has opened my eyes to his promises. May God open your eyes. Amen.



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