

Dear Friends,

God wisely teaches us through many Old Testament lessons and personalities. Near the top of the list we see two men who always capture our attention, Elijah and Elisha. When I recently read this week's study lesson, it stirred me deeply. We so need an Elisha today to speak loud and clear to God's people, to pray for them, as Elisha did for his servant, "*Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see.*" We need an Elisha to remind the frightened, confused sheep under their care, "***Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.***" Sadly, too many pastors seem to act the part of Elisha's servant, wringing their hands and saying there is nothing we can do. Or reacting more in the anger and divisiveness of the day with loud accusing words against "Them," whoever "Them" is.

The troubles we face are real. My mother nursed sick people through the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918, and with far less medical aid or life convenience than we enjoy today. Angry, divisive, and self-serving politicians are a constant, though many of them in our day have sadly found a megaphone. Instead of following them, godly people in the past laughed at them, and went right on serving our God and His people. And when the current pandemic and political angry chaos are only a faded memory, there will be another medical fear and another "Political crisis."

The challenge for godly believers of our time is clear. Will we imitate Elisha's servant, wringing our hands in worrisome fear, seeing only all the things that are wrong and bad? Or will we follow Elisha's example, see the Lord and His army, and comfort those around us? Even do good to those who see themselves as our adversaries? We face this choice daily. God reminds us in this lesson of the right path.

The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. (Psalm 34:7 KJV)

Notice the wording of this verse. The Lord's angel "Encampeth" around His people. He doesn't pass by and casually notice them occasionally. Take courage in the Lord and find an Elisha in your life to help you keep your eyes on God's army instead of the fears and rage of this world.

Love in Jesus,

Joe Holder

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A Prophet Prays—God Opens Eyes

And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we

do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. (2 Kings 6:15-17 KJV 1900)

I love the Old Testament lessons from both Elijah's and Elisha's lives. They teach us so much about God's presence and protection, even when we fail to notice. God sent both prophets to His rebellious Northern Kingdom of Israel, even after they had immersed themselves in Baal worship. The Lord showed great long-suffering in sending His men with His message long after the people and their leaders had turned a deaf ear to their God. Elisha's time was just over a hundred years after Rehoboam's rebellion. He lived to see the wicked Ahab's death.

As background for our study verses, Israel was engaged in war with Syria. God gave Elisha full information regarding Syria's plans and strategies, which he passed along to the king of Israel. Whatever Syria tried to do to gain a military advantage, Israel's armies were poised and waiting to foil their plans. At first, the king of Syria thought he must have a spy for Israel in his inner circle of advisors. Then one of them told him about Elisha and Elisha's God. His first thought was to destroy this man. He located Elisha and sent "...a great host" of his soldiers to kill the prophet. Our study verses pick up at this point. Overnight the Syrian army surrounded the village of Dothan where Elisha was staying. When Elisha's servant awoke and went outside to survey the day, he was shocked to see the Syrian army.

Alas, my master! how shall we do? To impose a contemporary cliché onto Elisha's servant at this moment, in effect he was wringing his hands in fear, "What are we to do!" He saw no way of escape and no hope. I wonder. Have you ever faced a similar situation? And responded as this man?

The lesson teaches us at so many levels with so many needful lessons. Lack of faith blinds us to the Lord's presence in our troubles. Have you ever heard someone say, "I'm just going to trust God and take a blind leap of faith." The person who says this has no real understanding of faith. Faith always gives sight—and insight. ***It is never blind!*** In fact, 2 Peter 1:9 reminds us; it is lack of faith that Scripture associates with being blind, not its presence. Faith enabled Moses to rise above his Egyptian training to ***see "...him who is invisible."*** (Hebrews 11:27b) As our lesson unfolds, it reinforces this truth. Had the servant looked around in faith, he would have seen God's army, far more numerous and powerful than Syria.

Would you like to see how faith deals with problems? Study Elisha's reaction, both to his servant and to the Syrian army.

And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.

Later in the chapter, in keeping with Elisha's faith, God blinded the Syrians. Then, instead of calling Israel's army to take advantage and kill the Syrians, Elisha led the Syrians back to their own border. He guided them back to their home!

How would you react today, in the current climate of our world, if a man who always chose to "Walk to his own drum beat," actually to God's, spoke Elisha's words to you? "*Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.*" Honestly, I can't imagine more assuring words. ***God's people need to hear Elisha right now.*** We can't improve our personal situation or the world around us by fear, by suspicion, by claiming to know more than we know, or by promoting one of the

constant parade of conspiracy theories that always abound. Our one and only hope of improvement is to find the courage, the faith, to follow Elisha's example. Shall we be the blind servant? Or shall we be the Elisha of the moment? So we face an ongoing war with a superior adversary. So we must deal with an invisible threat that we know very little about. So good, decent people all around us are stirring more divisiveness and hostility than peace and unity. Someone needs to stand up and shout out, "*Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.*" We've heard the voice of fear. We've felt the anxious stirring of fear that makes us want to sleep through the day till it all just goes away, and that keeps us awake at nights. We've heard the angry voices, and they give us no comfort. We've heard all the wild, and often near groundless claims of who "They" are and what "They" are doing to destroy our world. We need to hear the stronger voice of faith, reminding us that our solution is not in politicians (Lord, deliver us!), it is not in sincere, but unsubstantiated claims of either miracle cures or dismissals of the problem. We shall not be healed by believing wild theories of the evil "Them" and what they are doing. Folks, there is nothing new in any of these faulty ideas. They have always been with us. When COVID-19 becomes a faded memory of what a few very old people faintly recall and tell their grandchildren, all these things will still be around, and they will still stir the hearts of naïve people who rise in the morning and survey their world, but they survey their world with one essential ingredient missing. They look at their world through the lens of their own limitations. They do not see it through God's "Corrective" lens of faith. They see the enemy. They fear his danger. And they wring their hands with Elisha's servant, "What are we to do?"

No, we need an Elisha who looks right past invisible threats, who ignores angry, divisive, and therefore destructive people. We need that Elisha who prays for people.

And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see.

We can chatter till we are hoarse about what is wrong, and ***not one problem will go away or get better.*** We need to talk about our God, our one hopeful solution. It was a dark day when Malachi wrote his prophecy.

Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts? And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered. (Malachi 3:14-15)

Don't miss the point. It was God's people who were chasing these faithless, fruitless notions. What a sad example of the very people who should be trusting and serving God, but, instead, they call darkness light and light darkness. Their moral and spiritual compass has become wholly disoriented. But, when even godly people shout more their confusion and unbelief than their faith, don't stop listening. If you listen carefully, you'll hear other voices, quietly, comfortably, peacefully telling you a different message. ***Listen to them!***

Then they that feared the LORD spoke often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. (Malachi 3:16)

Never in my lifetime have godly people needed more to talk to each other, to remind each other of our God and His abiding and faithful goodness. God is on His throne! Neither COVID nor divisive, angry politicians have dethroned Him! Would you rather chase the voice of the proud, the voice of those who call sin righteousness and righteousness sin, or would you rather hear the quiet voice of faith? And which voice will we believe? Which voice will we follow?

I lay no claim to being a noble Elisha, but I have found myself in prayer frequently during the last year, praying with the prophet, “*Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see.*” Where are we looking? Whose voice commands our attention? Ponder Elisha’s servant. When he surveyed the new day without faith, all he saw was what was wrong and how many bad things could possibly happen. Sound familiar? Yes? Well, join Elisha in his prayer. Start by praying for the Lord to open your eyes. Pray for the Lord to show you, to remind you of the invisible forces under His command, who could easily eliminate the Syrian danger, or any ominous threat we face today. Seek your deliverance from Him.

Did the Lord answer Elisha’s prayer? Let Scripture answer.

And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

How do we know if we are walking by faith or not? This lesson answers our question. If all we see around us are adversaries and bad things, we are trying to face life without God, and without the amazing “Faith-link” He has given us. We are trying to perform microscopic surgery with a blindfold over our eyes! Look up! ***Look up in faith.***

How do you know if you are looking up in faith? Simple. If you see good people who may be blind at the moment, but people who love and truly long to serve you and others in the family of God, you are looking in faith. If you see an invisible army, one that has never lost a battle, ***already surrounding you*** in the stress of a dangerous world, you are looking in faith. If you are praying, as Elisha did, “*Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see,*” you are walking in faith. Stay the course!

How should we deal with the adversary? In the case of COVID, pray for an expeditious manufacture and administration of the vaccine. In the case of anger and divisiveness, pray for the Prince of Peace to do what He promised to do in such moments, “*...speak peace unto the heathen.*” (Zechariah 9:10)

What do we “See” today? Are we “Seeing” our world through the lens of faith or the lens of unbelief? Let’s join Elisha’s prayer en masse. And let’s daily pray for grace to live Elisha’s influence on the people we love. Pray for them to see our God’s remedy and stop looking at the first sight of adversity. Our God is able to help us!

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