

Sermon for September 29, 2024 – Festival of St. Michael and All Angels

2 Kings 6:8–17 EHV (with special emphasis on vs. 15-17)

Theme: “O Lord, open our eyes that we may see!”

- 1) We often feel alone and afraid.
- 2) Reassure us of your protection and presence.

⁸Now when the king of Aram was waging war against Israel, he would make plans with his officials, saying, “My camp will be at such and such a place.”

⁹But the man of God would send a message to the king of Israel, saying, “Be careful when you pass this place because the Arameans are going down there.” ¹⁰So the king of Israel would send scouts to the place that the man of God had pointed out. So the man of God warned him, and he was kept safe—and not just once or twice.

¹¹The king of Aram was enraged because of this. He summoned his officials and said to them, “Won’t you tell me who of us is for the king of Israel?”

¹²One of his officials said, “No, my lord the king. It is Elisha, the prophet in Israel, who tells the king of Israel the words which you speak in your bedroom.”

¹³Then he said, “Go and see where he is. Then I’ll send men and capture him.”

He was told, “Dothan is where he is.”

¹⁴So he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They came at night and surrounded the city. ¹⁵When the man of God’s servant got up early and went out, there were soldiers, horses, and chariots surrounding the city. So his attendant said to Elisha, “Oh no, my lord! What will we do?”

¹⁶He answered, “Don’t be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”

¹⁷Then Elisha prayed and said, “O LORD, open his eyes so that he can see.” Then the LORD opened the servant’s eyes, and he saw that the hills were full of horses and chariots of fire, all around Elisha.

Introduction

Why don’t we courageously confess Christ to the world, unfazed by what people might think or do to us? Why don’t we commit bold acts of love, like inviting a homeless person or a stranger to stay in our guest room? Why don’t we give selflessly to charity, unafraid of losing what we’ve saved for our future comforts? I can point out many Bible passages that encourage us to be bold in our faith and love, so why aren’t we?

Our fears hold us back. We’re afraid of witnessing Christ boldly, lest our friends and family get upset and disown us. We’re afraid of inviting a stranger into our home, fearing he might steal or do us bodily harm. We’re afraid of giving too much money to charity, worried that unforeseen circumstances might prevent us from maintaining the quality of life we enjoy.

These fears all stem from the belief that it's up to us to provide for and protect ourselves. But is it truly our responsibility? Does the Lord leave us alone on this earth to face every problem by ourselves? No. Before His ascension, Jesus promised: *"Surely I am with you always until the end of the age."*¹⁵ Not only that, but He also promised to send the Holy Spirit to be our Counselor and Helper throughout life. We do not face life alone. God is with us.

Oh, that we would see the spiritual reality of how guarded we are by God! I'm certain that if we were to fully grasp the truth in faith, our lives would change drastically. Therefore, let us learn to pray: **"O Lord, open our eyes that we may see!"** 1) We often feel alone and afraid. 2) Reassure us of your protection and presence.

Part One: We often feel alone and afraid

The latter part of our sermon text allows us to catch a glimpse of the unseen spiritual truth that surrounds us: we are not alone. But before we delve into that, let's summarize the events that led up to it.

Aram was at war with Israel, secretly moving troops around to launch attacks against God's wayward people. The LORD allowed Elisha to know where the armies of Aram were headed. Elisha warned Israel's king so that he could move his troops ahead of the king of Aram. This happened again and again.

The king of Aram became convinced that a traitor lurked within his ranks. However, before the king took action against his military leaders, one of his officials intervened, asserting that this was not the work of a spy, but the actions of Elisha the prophet. In response, the king of Aram dispatched a formidable force of chariots and horsemen to encircle the city of Dothan and capture Elisha.

¹⁵When the man of God's servant got up early and went out, there were soldiers, horses, and chariots surrounding the city. So his attendant said to Elisha, "Oh no, my lord! What will we do?"

Imagine the profound sense of isolation, fear, and confusion that gripped Elisha's servant. He found himself in a perilous situation, surrounded by the enemy, all because he had dared to follow God's command and warn Israel. The servant was desperate.

Have you ever experienced a similar feeling of being alone, afraid, and questioning God's presence in your life? If we are honest with ourselves, the answer is a resounding "yes." Think about the severe storm that struck that threatened your neighborhood, leaving you on edge. Consider the strained relationships or financial challenges you have faced. Think about the illness or death of a loved one. Think about the internal struggles you endure, battling doubts, temptations, and the desire to abandon your trust in God. In all these circumstances, we often feel utterly alone, surrounded by the unbelieving world, our sinful flesh, and the malevolent forces of hell. They seek to capture and subjugate us to the authority of the devil. When we contemplate these realities, we find ourselves in a state akin to Elisha's servant—feeling utterly alone and uncertain. What are we going to do?

¹⁶ [Elisha] answered, “Don't be afraid”

Hold on a moment. How could Elisha say this? An army was encamped outside his house, searching for him! Can you imagine a gang of armed men surrounding your home and your spouse telling you not to be afraid? What gave Elisha such unwavering confidence?

“...for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”

Elisha placed his trust in God's promise to protect him, which he learned from God's Word. King David wrote, *“The Angel of the LORD camps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.”*ⁱⁱ

There's an evil army camped outside our door—the devil, the world, and our sinful nature. Surrounded by so much danger and tragedy, why shouldn't we be afraid? Because God promises to be with us, as the Psalmist writes: ¹*God is our refuge and strength, a helper who can always be found in times of trouble.* ²*That is why we will not fear when the earth dissolves and when the mountains tumble into the heart of the sea... The Lord of Armies is with us. The God of Jacob is a fortress for us.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Part Two: Reassure us of your protection and presence.

Elisha had unwavering faith in the Lord. His servant, on the other hand, lacked that confidence. So, what did Elisha do? ¹⁷*Then Elisha prayed and said, “O LORD, open his eyes so that he can see.” Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he saw that the hills were full of horses and chariots of fire, all around Elisha.*

God opened the eyes of the servant to see the spiritual reality: the hills were filled with fiery holy angels, ready to protect Elisha. It is interesting to note the text does not say that Elisha saw this sight, but only that his servant saw it. Why was that? Was it because Elisha was clairvoyant and always saw the spiritual realm? No, instead, I am convinced that Elisha did not need to see the angels nor receive a prophetic revelation that they were present. He knew they were there from God's Word, which proclaims, *“If you make the Most High your shelter, ¹⁰evil will not overtake you. Disaster will not come near your tent. ¹¹Yes, he will give a command to his angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways.”*^{iv}

To Elisha, a man of faith, God's awesome protection was self-evident. Is it to us? Oh, how weak our faith can be! Like Elisha's servant, we often perceive only the problems that surround us and feel alone. We cry out for answers, but the truth is right before us—in the Bible. We don't need to physically see God to know His presence. We have His promise in Scripture. And if we have His promise, that's all we truly need. Those same angels who camped around Elisha continue to watch over us. The same God who loved Elisha loves us as well.

But we might be tempted to ask, “How do I know this is true? It's obvious that God loved Elisha, but how can I be certain that He loves me? I am not a “man of God,” am I? How, then, can I know that God will show me the same grace that he showed Elisha?”

Well, let me share an important truth: Elisha did not deserve God's love, either. Like his predecessor, Elijah, Elisha was a sinner - just like you and me.^v In and of himself, there was nothing unique about Elisha that moved God to love him. No, God's forgiving grace is what saved Elisha and changed him, just as it changed you. Elisha believed in God's promised Messiah, and this faith was credited to him as righteousness.^{vi} The same is true for you as well. Through faith in Jesus' work of redemption, you share the same status before God that Elisha did: you are a man or woman of God! This is all true, not because you have earned or deserved it, but because God promises all these things to you in Jesus.

Think back to your baptisms. Do you remember learning what happened at that moment? God washed away all your sins and inscribed His name upon you. He sent you the Holy Spirit to mark you as His redeemed child. Because of Christ's work of saving you, whenever God the Father looks at you, He sees his Son who saved you^{vii}. You are covered with Christ – just like Elisha. Through faith, you are God's dearly loved child.

Therefore, let me ask you a question: what king permits his child to be captured by an enemy? I can't think of any. Neither does God. Kings love and protect their children at all costs. They dispatch armies to safeguard them. If this is true for earthly kings, it is undoubtedly true for God. God loves you and has adopted you into His family. He is so protective of you that He sends out His army—His holy angels—to encamp around you.

“But if that is true,” someone might object, “Why does God allow danger, trouble, and hardship to come my way?” Well, just as any good King educates his sons in the art of warfare and sends them into military service (as exemplified by England's princes William and Harry), so also the LORD trains us for war and sends us into service for His Kingdom. He knows that such service is for our good – teaching us to let go of every worldly thing, and to fear, love and trust in him above everything. Yes, He sends us into battle, but He never leaves us alone. He commands his entire army of angels to protect us. Not only that, but He is present – keeping His promise to work in all things for our everlasting good.

So, let me ask you once more: why are we so afraid? It's because we don't trust God as we ought. May this lead us to pray: “Lord, forgive our cowardice and lack of faith. Open our eyes to see your promises and believe them. You have said: *“I will never leave you, and I will never forsake you.”* Help us reply in confidence, *“The Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?”*^{viii} After confessing this truth, help us live boldly in the glory of your name, trusting in your salvation. Amen.”

ⁱ Matthew 28:20 EHV

ⁱⁱ Psalm 34:7 EHV

ⁱⁱⁱ Psalm 46:1-2,7 EHV

^{iv} Psalms 91:9b-11 EHV

^v Cf. James 5:17a

^{vi} Cf. Romans 4:5, 23-25

^{vii} Cf. Galatians 3:26-27

^{viii} Hebrews 13:5-6 EHV