

MT. ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Easter 5

5/19/2019

2 Kings 6:15-17

LORD OPEN MY EYES

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I remember one of my seminary professors telling the class about one of our early WELS missionaries in Africa. That missionary was spending the night in a village where he was serving a bush congregation. He was staying in a grass hut like the rest of the villagers. The local chief was not in support of the work that this missionary was doing. That night he came with his troops to surround the hut, and to kill the missionary. The missionary spent the night in prayer steadfastly inside of his hut just waiting for the chief and his troops to attack...but they never did.

In the morning he got up, looked through the window, and saw that no one was there. They had just gone away. Sometime later that chief did come to faith in Jesus as his Savior. And the missionary had the opportunity to ask him why he and his troops didn't attack him that day. The chief said, "Well when we saw all those guards that were posted all the way around your hut, we knew that there was no way that we could overtake them. We tried to wait them out for a while, but when they wouldn't go away we called off the attack. The missionary was speechless. There had been no guards that were posted outside of his hut. The only answer that he could come up with was that God had sent his angels to keep him safe to encircle the hut and protect him. What he could not see God allowed the chief and his troops to see.

Now that story is strikingly similar to the account that we have in our text for today. We hear accounts like this and this seem to us to be a bit unbelievable. I mean we have never seen anything like that. These are the kinds of things that writers put into movie scripts that push the limits of our imagination. We look at them and think that maybe they are just fanciful accounts that never really happened. But they did. We have just never experienced anything like that. Or have we without even knowing? This really gets us thinking about all the things that we don't see. The things that God takes care of behind the scenes that he keeps hidden from our physical eyes. Often for us it's easy to focus on what we can see. And let's be honest, much of what we can see is scary.

We see all of those impossible situations that confront us. The insurmountable obstacle, the unsolvable predicament that we don't know our way out of. And we lose sight of everything else. We forget about what we don't see. The promises that he has made to us and the angels that he sends to protect us. Our prayer is the same as that of Elisha. That God would open our eyes to be able to see those things that we are not able to see. The cross, the empty tomb, forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. We pray that God would open our eyes to allow us to see the reality that those who are for us are more than those who are against us, and that what matters most is what we don't see.

Elisha's servant certainly got an eye full when he got up that morning and saw all the horses and chariots surrounding the city. They had come to capture Elisha, and they meant business. Elisha had been messing up their plans. Ben-Hadad was the king of Aram and he had this nation wide war with Israel. They weren't engaged in a full frontal attack or battle, but they were sending raiding parties over the border that would terrorize the hearts of the people and plunder them a little bit at a time. God in his omniscience not only knew Ben-Hadad's plans and where they had planned to camp that night, but God revealed all that to Elisha. And in turn Elisha would go to Joram the King of Israel and tell him. Joram would then avoid those places or send his troops to those places before the Arameans got there. This was happening time and time again. It happened so much that Ben-Hadad started to get frustrated. He assumed that they must have had a traitor in their midst. Someone in their own camp was spying for Israel and revealing their plans. After careful investigation though they found out it was Elisha who was revealing their plans. He even knew the words that the King spoke in his bedroom. So he sent these troops to capture Elisha. First of all so that he would stop revealing his plans and perhaps with the thought that he could bring Elisha into his employment and use that knowledge for his own gain.

Elisha's servant certainly had every earthly reason to be afraid as he looked at what he saw early that morning. The Arameans were some of the fiercest warriors of the land. Here they were fully encircled by these fierce warriors with no troops of their own to defend them. They were weak. They were vulnerable. They were defenseless. There's no way they could've staged off an attack. He assumed they were coming to kill Elisha. That's why his heart was seized with fear. And I think we can understand that.

How many times have you and I looked at those things that we can see and then were led to cry out, "Oh No, what will we do?" Just think about all the danger that we face day in and day out. Nuclear bombs, terrorists, accidents, disease, all threaten to snuff out our life in an instant. Those things that we can see can be so scary. The x-rays that show us the cancer that is spread all throughout the body. The competitor who is not just running us down publicly but openly stealing our customers from us. The kids at school that are bullying you and pushing you around. The neighbors that are harassing you. The cars that cut you off and almost running you right off the road. That job that's so easy to lose and that new job that is so difficult to find. We know what it's like not living up to the expectations that others may have of us. Or to be in despair from poor choices we made. Or we have relationship problems for what could be a thousand different reasons.

We've had those insurmountable obstacles that face us that we just don't know how to get around. We allow ourselves to be blinded by what we see. We lose sight of everything else. We've been in that spot of not knowing the way out. And we let fear grip our hearts and paralyze us, as we cry out, "Oh no, what shall we do?"

Look at the text. When that servant was gripped with fear, what did Elisha do? He prayed that God would open his eyes so that he could see physically what he should have known in his spirit, that God was right there protecting. God opened his eyes, and allowed him to see things that are normally hidden from our eyes. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.

Let's understand where this fear and doubt come from as we are confronted with these insurmountable problems. It comes from a lack of trusting God. But the fear that moves our hearts, the fear that blinds us really comes from failing to trust the promises that he has made, because all that we are focused on is all that we can see right in front of us. That lack of faith is sin. That sin like all sin makes us deserving of drowning because of unbelief in the lake of fire called hell. That's the very reason for which Jesus came into this world.

When Jesus was confronted with those insurmountable obstacles, he never once doubted the loving care and promises of his heavenly Father. In fact, with a firm and loving trust in his heavenly Father's care, Jesus continued forward on the mission for which he came. Through his life death and resurrection he wipes away all our sins and open heaven for us. That's the good news. Because of Jesus your sins are forgiven. Because of Jesus all of those times you have failed to trust, all of those times you let fear grip you, all of those times you tried to find your own solution, those sins are removed from God's sight as far as the east is from the west. Because of Jesus heaven is opened for you.

And it is with that confidence in the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation that we can now stand with confidence next to Elisha and say, "Don't be afraid." Those who are with you are more than those who are with them. It's with this confidence in our God who has won eternal salvation that we can stand with Joshua who spoke to Moses and started off for the land of Canaan and said, "do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them" (Numbers 14:9). We can be confident like Hezekiah when the Assyrian army and Sennacherib threatened Jerusalem and said, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the king of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him. With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God to help us and to fight our battles. And the people gained confidence..." (2 Chronicles 32:7). We can be confident like David in Psalm 3, "I will not fear though tens of thousands assail me on every side. Arise, Lord! Deliver me, my God! Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked." Imagine if God were to open your eyes and see what you don't see. You would see God in all his goodness fighting for you every step of the way. You would see that God has not left you or forsaken you, but walks with you. You would see the angels he sends you to guard and protect you. You would see God break the bow and shatter the spear. You would see God using all things for your eternal good, just the way he promised. What a sight that would be.

Now fear has been wiped away. Doubts have vanished. Now we find ourselves with more time on our hands because we no longer worry about everything else. Now we can dedicate more time to serving God in thanks and praise for all he has done for us. Now we can spend more time telling others the good news of the gospel. And being involved with our family of faith in our community and in our neighborhood. We are not afraid. We want to get to know who they are. So that, by the Holy Spirit, he may open their eyes to see what we already see. And so Elisha's prayer becomes a prayer of outreach, Lord open their eyes so that they may no longer be lost, but found in your ever present love and forgiveness. Use me for this purpose.

Even though God doesn't allow us to see all these things physically, we see them spiritually as we trust in the promises he made. By Word and Sacrament He reveals them through our hearts, so that we can trust and hold firmly to them when we face those challenges.

The truth is while we are on this earth we will always be under attack by the devil. And like Ben-Hadad and the Arameans the devil doesn't always come at us with a full frontal attack. He sends spiritual raiding parties to rob us of our faith and to plunder the treasure & pleasure that God has given to us. As you continue to fight this battle, let this be your comfort. What you do not know, God knows. What you cannot see, God sees. And the truth is we don't have to see. For we trust that God will always be with us. That he will always keep his promises to us. And that the battle for our lives and hearts has already been won by our God thanks to the cross and the empty tomb. And that he will send his angels to watch over and guard us. May God open the eyes of your heart so that you can see spiritually, but you cannot see physically. And trust firmly in him, in all situations. What matters most is not what you can see. What matters most is what you can't see. Amen.