ELISHA: AN AMAZING STORY OF SEEING THE UNSEEN
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By Pastor Stan
2 Kings 6:8-23

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INTRO.
-- Intro. Song: "Open the Eyes of My Heart, Lord"
-- One way that we illustrate the life of discipleship is the diagram called "The Disciple's Cross."
-- This year we’re emphasizing the circle at the center of the cross that represents "abiding in Christ," having a close, intimate and life-transforming relationship with Christ. Our theme associated with abiding in Christ is "Seeing the Unseen" and is taken from our theme verse for the year, 2 Corinthians 4:18.
"So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but what is unseen, for what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."
-- Today, I want to close this series with an amazing story about seeing the unseen presence of God, an incident in the life of the prophet Elisha recorded in 2 Kings 6.

I. The Story
A. Syria’s Guerilla Warfare (vv. 8-14)
   1. The Problem
   -- Syria, the nation that lies on Israel's northern border, is frequently engaged in some kind of warfare with Israel in the books of 1 & 2 Kings. Here in 2 Kings 6 the king of Syria is carrying out a guerilla warfare of surprise ambushes. At least, they're supposed to be surprise attacks, but every time the Syrian king plans an ambush the Israelis seem to learn about it ahead of time and are able to avoid it.
   2. The Solution
   -- Finally, the king of Syria has had enough. He calls an emergency meeting of his military cabinet and looks at them and declares that one of them is a traitor who has been informing the Israelis about their secret military plans.
   One of the officers, who obviously has some intelligence sources inside Israel, speaks up and replies, "Your Majesty, it's not any of us. It's that prophet Elisha who is informing the king of Israel. Some how he knows everything we plan. He even seems to know what you talk about in your bedroom" (Probably a bit of a paranoid exaggeration).
   The king of Syria immediately gives a command to find the location of this prophet named Elisha, and the report comes back that Elisha is staying in Dothan, a small village about 10 miles north of Samaria, the capital of Israel. The Syrian king decides to undertake a daring military mission. He sends a chariot division deep inside enemy territory, to the village of Dothan, with orders to capture Elisha. Moving under the cover of darkness, the chariot division crosses the border into Israel and quickly drives on to Dothan and completely surrounds the village during the night.

B. The Remarkable Deliverance (vv. 15-23)
   1. Of Elisha (vv. 15-19)
   -- Dothan is situated on a plain, which is surrounded by hills and mountains. Early the next morning Elisha's servant gets up and walks outside only to discover that the town is surrounded by the enemy, the entire plain is filled with Syrian horses and chariots.
   In a desperate panic the servant runs back inside to awaken Elisha, yelling that the enemy has them surrounded. He pulls Elisha outside and points nervously to the Syrian chariots that fill the plain on every side and then cries out fearfully to Elisha, "Oh my Lord, what are we going to do?"
   -- Strangely, Elisha isn't alarmed or even disturbed.
   Cf., v. 16
-- Now, that seems like a patently absurd statement. They're surrounded by a mobile and heavily armed division of the powerful Syrian army, and Dothan is an unarmed village. There's no army in Dothan, no soldiers at all, just unarmed villagers, potters and carpenters, women and children. Elisha seems to be talking nonsense. Then we find out why Elisha is so calm. Elisha speaks a simple one-sentence prayer.

v. 17a

-- And as soon as Elisha lifts this prayer, God opens the eyes of his servant so that he can see not just the physical realities but also the unseen, spiritual realities. It's as if God pulls back a curtain to reveal to the servant a reality that has always been there but cannot normally be seen by physical eyes. The servant looks around the village and still sees the enemy chariots, but now he sees what is certainly the most amazing and truly breath-taking sight he ever has or ever will see: the hills surrounding the enemy army are also full of horses and chariots, only these are horses and chariots of fire, like the one that had taken Elijah into heaven. The enemy may be surrounding Dothan, but they're surrounded themselves - and outnumbered, by the glorious, awesome army of God. Any one of those chariots of fire could easily defeat the entire Syrian army, and the whole place is surrounded by them!

Just then the Syrians launch their attack to close the noose on Dothan. We might expect the army of fiery chariots to annihilate the Syrians, something that it could have easily done, of course. But as potentially devastating as this fiery army is, it actually doesn't have to do anything. Instead, Elisha once again offers a simple one-sentence prayer.

v. 18a

As soon as Elisha makes this request, the entire Syrian army is blinded by the Lord. This could be a literal blindness, but it also appears to me that this could be a kind of mental blindness in which they could still see objects but not really recognize them or process what they were seeing.

Cf., v. 19

-- This sounds a lot to me like what happened in the old Star Wars movie, when Obiwan Kenobe would make a gesture to the storm troopers, and they would enter a kind of hypnotic trance in which they wouldn't recognize him but would follow his instructions. Any how, Elisha tells the Syrians that they're in the wrong place. Their GPS has led them to the wrong address, but Elisha will be glad to take them to the right place, where they can find the man they're looking for. So Elisha proceeds to lead the entire Syrian army down the road to the capital city of Samaria.

2. Of the Syrian Army (vv. 20-23)

-- Once Elisha gets the Syrians inside the walls of Samaria, he prays again for their eyes to be opened. The Lord opens their eyes, and they realize that they are standing in the middle of Samaria, completely surrounded by the Israeli army with no way to escape. Israel's King Joram is ecstatic; his enemy has just been led to him by Elisha, like a prophetic pied piper.

v. 21

-- As excited as a kid on Christmas morning, Joram is ready to completely destroy this enemy army that has caused him so much trouble. But Elisha's response is totally surprising. Elisha instructs King Joram not to kill the Syrians but to prepare a huge feast for them. He lets them eat and drink as much as they can, and then sends them back home to their families. In the previous chapter God had extended His grace to Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, by healing him of his leprosy. Now God extends mercy and grace to the entire Syrian army.

II. The Insights into God's Unseen Presence

-- This highly unusual military episode offers some valuable insights into God's unseen presence.

A. God's unseen presence is spiritual.

-- That, of course, sounds like stating the obvious. But what I mean is that this story demonstrates vividly to us that reality is more than physical, that there's more to reality than the material world that can be perceived with our five senses. This story discloses to us the supra-reality of the spiritual world.

-- God allowed Elisha's servant to see that world with his physical sense of sight, but the usual way He has provided for us to experience the spiritual world is through faith.

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Faith is like night vision equipment that enables troops to fight in the dark and to see what would otherwise be unseen.

-- What we find here in this story in 2 Kings is the same thing that Paul tells us in our theme verse for this year - that the world of the spirit is not only real, it is in many ways more real than the physical world. It's a higher and eternal reality.
2 Corinthians 4:18 “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but what is unseen, for what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

-- This story also underscores that the ability to see the unseen spiritual reality comes only from God. Elisha’s servant couldn't see it until God opened his eyes. The same is true for all of us. God must first open our eyes to the reality of who He is and how we can know Him. Until God regenerates us and graciously grants to us the gift of faith, we are spiritually blind and cut off from this marvelous reality.

B. God's unseen presence is sovereign and supreme and the source of ultimate security.
-- cf., vv. 16-17
-- Elisha and the village of Dothan may have been surrounded by the Syrian army, but the Syrian army itself was surrounded by the army of God. When God is on your side, you are never outnumbered.

If we find our ultimate security in anything in this physical, material world, we're trusting something that can offer at best a limited security, something certain to fail you in some way at some time. Ultimate security, security that cannot fail, comes only from one source, the Lord God who alone possesses supreme power and sovereign power.

Elisha says to his servant, “Don't be afraid. Those who are with us are more than those against us.” John echoes those words in his first epistle.

1 John 4:4 (NASV) You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.

-- To Elisha's servant it looked hopeless, and, indeed, from a purely physical, material perspective it was hopeless. But Elisha never looked at life that way. Elisha always saw the presence of God in every picture, and Elisha knew that you and God always make a majority.

C. God's unseen presence is accessed through prayer.
-- It's prayer that opens the servant's eyes so he can see the unseen presence of God. It's prayer that brings divine intervention to blind the eyes of the Syrian army. It's always prayer that connects us to God's unseen presence. It's always prayer that opens our eyes to behold the marvelous glories of our God. It's always prayer that moves the mighty hand of our God. It's always prayer that makes a way where there is no way. Because that's the way that God has ordained to work.

CONCLUSION
-- The book Vertical Church by pastor James MacDonald is about becoming a church that sees the unseen, a church that has a passion for God's glory, that yearns for God's glory to be manifest to and through it. MacDonald identifies basic characteristics of such a church, what he calls the four pillars of the vertical church: unashamed adoration (worship), unapologetic preaching (of God's Word), unafraid witness, and, most importantly, unceasing prayer. Here's what MacDonald writes concerning prayer:

"&hellip;the most important thing a Vertical Church can do [is] pray&hellip; God must speak in the preaching, God must show up to receive our worship, God must ripen the hearts of people to the gospel, and all of that He will do if we pray biblically, but He will do none of it if we do not pray&hellip;In Vertical Church it all comes down to the praying."

Then he asks this question:
"When was the last time you participated in a faith-driven, expectation-filled prayer meeting that invited God to reveal His glory and show up in power at your church?" (Vertical Church, pp. 269-270).

Good question.