

The Lord Wins

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[0 : 00] Our Bible reading is taken from the book of 2 Kings, chapter 6, and we're starting to read at verse 8.

And it's on page 373 in the Church Bibles. 2 Kings, chapter 6, starting at verse 8. Now the king of Aram was at war with Israel.

After conferring with his officers, he said, I will set up my camp in such and such a place. The man of God sent word to the king of Israel, Beware of passing that place, because the Arameans are going down there.

So the king of Israel checked on the place indicated by the man of God. Time and again, Elisha warned the king so that he was on guard in such places. This enraged the king of Aram.

He summoned his officers and demanded of them, Tell me, which of us is on the side of the king of Israel? None of us, my lord the king, said one of his officers.

[1 : 13] But Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom. Go, find out where he is, the king ordered, so that I can send men and capture him.

The report came back. He is in Dothan. Then he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city. When a 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. Don't be afraid, the prophet answered. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.

And Elisha prayed. Open his eyes, lord, that 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.

As the enemy came down towards him, Elisha prayed to the lord, Strike this army with blindness. So he struck them with blindness as Elisha had asked.

[2 : 29] Elisha told them, This is not the road and this is not the city. Follow me and I will lead you to the man that you are looking for.

And he led them to Samaria. After they entered the city, Elisha said, Lord, open the eyes of these men so that they can see. Then the lord opened their eyes and they looked and there they were inside Samaria.

When the king of Israel saw them, he asked Elisha, Shall I kill them, my father? Shall I kill them? Do not kill them, he answered. Would you kill those you have captured with your own sword or bow?

Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink and then go back to their master. So he prepared a great feast for them. And after they had finished eating and drinking, he sent them away.

And they returned to their master. So the bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel's territory. This is the word of the lord. Great joy.

[3 : 45] Thanks Ruth for reading. Liz for praying. Martin for leading. And well done for making it here this morning. It's a great joy to see you all. And let me add my welcome to those that have already greeted you.

My name is James. As Martin said, I'm on staff team here. And you might not recognize, but I have an accent. So if it's slightly hard to follow, I hope it's not too bad.

But let me pray as we start. So Father, we, Lord, we thank you for this passage. And we pray that we would humble our hearts now. We pray that we would listen to your word.

And we pray that we would see you clearly this morning in Glasgow. In Jesus' name. Amen. And I wonder if you noticed in the reading there, there's lots of references to sight and seeing.

And there's probably a bit more in the original languages. So lots of times there'll be these random beholds and behold this and behold that. And there's lots of these references to seeing and sight in this passage.

[4 : 47] And perception is really quite important. It's one of the things that we are particularly fascinated about these days. How do I feel?

What's the perception of how I view something? How are people viewing me? And in politics, perceptions are quite relevant as well.

So here's a couple of slides on perception. What do you see there? Some of us see it as blue. Some of us see it as gold. That's slightly older. Here's another one. A little more for the arty folk. Esher, what's going on there?

Are the stairs going up? Are the stairs going down? No one really knows. And then we've got that, for the slightly older folk, we've got that great picture of Gorbachev meeting Reagan. What's going on there?

They're discussing how they're going to sort out the Cold War. And Reagan, you notice, he's dressed in a suit. He's outside and he's looking very strong. And Gorbachev is kind of hunched up.

[5 : 45] In his coats, he needs protection. So what are the optics? What is the perception saying there? And how do we know where real power lies?

So I'll just catch us up slightly to the story of where we are in two kings this morning. We're after Adam and Eve. We're after Abraham, Father Abraham. We're after Moses and the Exodus.

And we're just after the kingdom of David and Solomon. Remember David and Solomon. And we've entered a time in Israel's history where that kingdom has split and it's divided.

So I've got this little map here. That should give us a steer there. And it's really two kingdoms. This page we can't see brilliantly clear. So I wonder how good is your ancient geography.

And up in the north, we've got the kingdom of Israel. And they worship false idols. They worship golden calves. And their capital is a city called Samaria.

[6 : 42] And above them is the scary Aramaeans, what we know as the Assyrians that we see in this passage. And then below us, we have Judah, the southern kingdom. Their capital is Jerusalem.

And they're slightly better. In theory, they worship the Lord. And we're looking at the life of the prophets Elijah and Elisha, who were sent by God to the northern kingdom and to call them back to repentance.

And what we see in these chapters that we've looked at is an amazing amount of miracles. And we see some of these miracles in this passage this morning. Now, miracles aren't particularly usual in the Bible.

They're really exceptional. We don't see them very often. And we only see them when God wants to highlight God's spokesperson, God's speaker, so that the people will listen up and listen to the person speaking.

So we think of Moses passing the Red Sea. And we think of Elijah and Elijah. We think of Jesus. And then we think of the growth of the church, the early church, wanting people to come into that church and all the miracles that happened there.

[7 : 51] And then 1 and 2 Kings, finally, it's not just history. It's history with a point. It's meant to evoke a heart response in us about how good and how great God is.

So just to give you a steer there, slightly intimidating sheet. It's not that intimidating. We'll whiz through it in no time. The little blue sheet there. And the first point there is the word of God protects Israel.

Israel in verses 8 and 10. So we open up our passage and the king of Aram has got a problem a bit like Theresa May. Maybe he followed the Galen Williams and shenanigans.

There's a leak in the secret security council of the king of Aram. What happens is someone is telling his enemy all his battle plans.

So the king of Israel knows everything. Wherever he does, wherever the king of Aram goes, the Israelites know and prepared. And what we read is that whenever he makes a plan, in verse 9, the man of God sent word to the king of Israel.

[8 : 57] Beware passing that place because the Arameans are going down there. So be on your guard. And what we see in these verses is the word of the man of God protecting the people of Israel.

You see, the word of God is really the center of these opening verses. It's the single most deciding factor in this conflict about who's going to win and who's going to lose.

Well, another way to look at beware, another way that they speak of it, is to be on your guard. And we think of Adam in the Garden of Eden. Be on your guard against the serpent coming into the garden.

We think of the priests in the old temple. Be on your guard to keep it clean, keep it pure, keep it holy. The first thing that we need to ask ourselves this morning is, are we on our guard?

Or are we losing the fight against sin? Are we dozing on duty in the battle against sin and the devil?

[10 : 05] And the worst thing that you can do as a soldier when you're meant to be on watch is to sleep on duty. Everyone knows that. Or have we been fooled by the way that things are and the way that the world looks?

And so as a king trying to defeat his enemy, the king of Aram, with this massive leak going on, it's quite awkward. And so we see his response in verse 11.

This enraged the king of Aram. So we're moving on to our second point. The king of Aram surrounds Elisha. And like every good bureaucrat and every good king who wants to demonstrate his power, what does he do?

He calls a meeting in verse 11. He summoned his officers and demanded of them. Won't you tell me which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?

It really is a bit of a parody. It's a bit of a laugh, isn't it? He holds a secret war council to find out who's telling his enemy about what he's discussing in the secret war council.

[11 : 16] And he's so clueless that he even includes himself in it. He goes, what does he go? He includes himself amongst the suspects. Which of us? Who is it? It might be me.

I don't know. And he still goes on and he rages. Looks what he does. He summons and he demands. He's acting as if he's in control. But he's really completely powerless in the situation.

And what do we see? No one but God save. But what the king is ignorant to, everyone else in the room seems to know. So verse 12. None of us, my lord, the king, said one of the officers, but Elisha.

And in the Hebrew there's a bit of a word play there. Because it literally goes no one. And the name Elisha means God save. So he goes, no one. But God saves.

And that's the thing that the author wants you to pick up on in this situation. And he goes on. The prophet who is in Israel tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom.

[12 : 20] God is acting here. And so God protects his people through his powerful word. And then we see, and the king of Aram still wants to show his power in verse 13.

So it's the language is terse. It's full of doing words. Go, find out or see where he is, the king ordered, so that I can send men and seize them. Go, seize, send.

Seize. And where is he? He is in Dothan. The report comes immediately. And everyone in the room knows that he's in Dothan.

But no one wants to do anything about it. Well, because he is the man of God who is powerful with the word of God.

And what does the king of Aram do? He sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. And they went by night and they surrounded the city. And here the king of Aram, he looks very powerful.

[13 : 21] But it's really a parody of power. It's not real power. And as we, maybe you've come here this morning with lots of struggles and troubles and wonders on your mind.

Those might seem very pressing and overwhelming. Maybe family struggles. Maybe kids aren't sleeping. Maybe the dog's gone a bit rogue. Maybe stuff's a bit tough at work.

Maybe there's a really bad illness going on. Maybe there's some certain relationship issue that's really clogging up your whole mind. And all of those might look and feel very powerful.

But they're not powerful next to this God. But do we see what the reality is of God's power at work?

So we're moving on to our third point there about the Lord surrounds. And when Elisha's servant wakes up the next morning and he sees the surrounding enemies on the hills, he's absolutely bewildered.

[14 : 24] It sounds brilliant in a Scots accent. I can't do it. But, oh my Lord, what shall we do? And in response, Elisha says something that is quite puzzling to his servant.

Verse 16. I wonder if you wondered about how puzzling it is. What is he says, Don't be afraid, the prophet answered. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.

Those who are with us. The first thing that Elisha encourages them up there is to not be afraid. And he's making a point about faith.

He's saying, Don't be afraid of what looks and seems powerful. Don't be deceived by appearances. But be afraid of the living God.

But fear in the Bible is always in reference to God. Don't be afraid of anything other than the living God and the Lord of the universe.

[15 : 26] And this is what Elisha wants his servant to understand. And what we need to understand in our struggles in life. Is that will we trust in what we see or will we persevere in faith?

Trusting in the God of the universe and in his word. And Elisha says this servant before revealing the reality. And the second thing that we see there is those who are with Elisha are more than those who are against him.

Well, who are with Elisha? And what do we see? O Lord, open his eyes that he may see Elisha praise. And then the Lord opens the servant's eyes.

And he looked and what did he see? He saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. And we know that those are on Elisha's side because they come with fire.

And fire in the Old Testament always signifies the presence of God. And the point here is not that we get distracted by the chariot, the flaming chariots and the warriors, but that we realize that God is totally in charge and totally powerful in the situation when we trust his word.

[16 : 45] So sometimes, you know the story about General Stonewall Jackson. I may have told you before, I don't know. But he was this ferocious general in the American Civil War who used to charge out in battle.

And one of his soldiers came up to him and asked him, General, how is it that you can be so brave? And he said, well, when I'm on battle, because I know God is in charge, I feel as safe as if I'm in my bed at home sleeping.

Everything in the universe is in God's hand and controlled by him. And then moving on, Cain blindness led into it. And what the king of Aram had sent his army to do so confidently to go see, send and seize, Elisha completely subverts.

These armies, they come to Elisha, and what happens? They don't see. They're blinded. Rather than being sent, they are led away. And rather than capturing, they become captured.

And the king of Aram's power is completely ridiculed here. He's powerless. And then the Lord opened their eyes, and behold, they were in Samaria.

[17 : 53] So Elisha leads them from Dothan, and he delivers them right into the heart of the capital of the northern kingdom, Samaria.

And having blinded them, Elisha then prays the exact prayer that he prayed for his servant, that the Lord may open their eyes.

Why does Elisha pray that? He prays it so that the enemies of Israel may see the danger that they're in, in opposing the God of Israel.

They've been ignorant of the God of Israel, and this God has now captured them and encircled them in Samaria. And they're in an exceedingly dangerous place, both physically, but also spiritually.

And you may wonder what the point of all this is. Why has Elisha gone to all this effort? I mean, he's got all these millions of fiery chariots and warriors there.

[18 : 55] Why doesn't he just zap the enemies of God and be done with it? Well, and that's the kind of thing Hollywood would do, isn't it? I mean, you don't see this kind of thing happening in Lord of the Rings.

In Lord of the Rings, you see orcs flying around everywhere, getting destroyed by the good guys in the Lord of the Rings. So Elisha's actions seem very strange to us here.

So what's going on? And we move on to our fourth point. So in verse 21, we see a very natural reaction from the king of Israel.

Here is an incredibly dangerous enemy that's been captured. It's in his grasp. They've been terrorizing them for ages. But they're also a formidable enemy.

It's kind of like taming or tornado. And so what does he want to do? He wants to kill them straight away and get rid of them. So he asks, Shall I kill them, my father? And Elisha, rather than pronouncing judgment on Israel's enemies, he gives them, by a word, salvation.

[19 : 58] Verse 22. I wonder if you noticed that. Don't kill them, he answered. Would you kill them, men? You have captured with your own sword. Oh, Baal.

I wonder if that's how you'd react to your worst high school enemy, your worst prep school enemy. Was that something that you'd do for them? And what happens?

We read, So he prepared a great feast for them. And after they had finished eating and drinking, he sent them away, and they returned to their master. And so what we have here is really a glorious, magnificent picture of what the good news and the gospel does for us, of enemies being united, coming together and feasting in peace.

That's what the gospel does for us. That's what it brings for us. And then in verse 23, and so the bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel's territory. And it's an incredible story of how the man of God, speaking the word of God, preserves his people and his prophets, brings salvation to his enemies, unifies people and brings peace, and demonstrates powerfully that God is the one true power and king over all other kings and bureaucrats in the world.

And it's enormously encouraging for us. And if you are someone here today who's come and you've got questions about the Christian faith and you're a Christian inquirer, this is a picture of the Christian hope, of feasting in Samaria, of feasting in the presence of God, enemies of God feasting in peace with their Lord.

[21 : 41] But the question still remains, why does Elisha save the enemies of Israel? Why does he save them through God's word, point five?

I think the first reason is that in saving Israel's enemies, Elisha is demonstrating what the people of God, what the Israelites were meant to be doing and God's action in the world.

You see, Israel was meant to be a light to the nations of the goodness and the greatness of God. But what happened? Because of their idolatry, because of their selfishness, because of their foolishness, they had become blind.

And they were trying to lead the blind. And that's what sin does to us. It makes us blind. And you see, rather than being distinct from the nations, they became exactly like the nations.

And in this section of 2 Kings, we see three pictures in the chapters just before this, we see three pictures of God's word going out powerfully to the nations, bringing salvation and restoring them.

[22 : 50] So we saw that in Naaman, the Syrian pagan Syrian general, being cleansed, made ritually clean from leprosy. And then we see the prophets of God flourishing on the banks of the Jordan.

And then the axe head that we didn't read about being lost. And what happens? The axe head is restored. And the prophets are expanding. And they're flourishing when before they were persecuted. And then here we have God's enemies being given sight.

Given sight. And saved from destruction. But the second reason, I think, he saves these enemies is that we need to understand who Elisha is.

We mustn't be confused about who he is. And that he is both a savior, God saves, but also a judge. And Aram will be the agents of God's judgment.

So consider back, just think how Elijah commissioned Elisha. And I'll just read the last verse, verse 17, on the quote that we have on the paper there. You see, Elisha is the assassin who brings judgment on sin and idolatry.

[24 : 14] And the means of doing this will be through these kings of Aram that he is feasting with now. You see, later on, in two chapters time, Elisha anoints Hazael king of Aram in two kings eight.

And look what Elisha says. I'll just read it for us. It's on the sheet there. Why is my lord weeping? Asked Hazael. Because I know the harm that you'll do to the Israelites, he answered. You'll set fire to their fortified places, kill their young men with the sword, dash the little children to the ground, rip open.

And Hazael said, how could your servant, a mere dog, accomplish such a feat? Indeed, the lord has shown me that you'll become king of Aram.

This nation that they're feasting with in peace now is going to be the agent of God's judgment on his rebellious people. And it's a shocking, terrifying picture.

You see, when Elisha spares these armies here, he knows that they'll be those agents on God's people later. And the great temptation for us as we come to this passage and we think about our lives is that we mistake the lay of judgment for salvation.

[25 : 33] See, last night, we celebrated Nathan and Dorothy's wedding and by all accounts, it was a really great time. And similarly, when Jesus returns, people will still be getting married and having children and living their lives right up to the moment that he appears after a long delay.

But the warning for us is that we must not mistake the lay of Jesus' coming for salvation. salvation. So Jesus is the Savior Judge.

So Elisha was the Savior Judge, but Jesus is the Savior Judge. So throughout the Gospels, we read of Jesus repeatedly by a word opening blind eyes, healing blindness so that people can see who he truly is.

And similarly, we also read many accounts of Jesus feasting with his enemies. but we also read of how he died for his enemies.

You see, that horrendous, horrific judgment that we read about was going to fall on Jesus for this, not for his sins but for our sins.

[26 : 43] And those that had rejected Jesus, those who had been God's enemies, well, they are given life, they're given salvation and they're brought into relationship with God being saved for eternity.

But we also know that those who reject Jesus remain under God's judgment. And so the challenge for us really this morning is that we might not mistake delay for salvation and that we would see things as they really are being on our guard.

But what might it look like to live with Jesus as our Lord and Savior? Well, the picture that the Bible uses is of a heavenly feast at the end of all time in chapter 21 of Revelation.

And feasts are great things, aren't they? It's brilliant coming together with your mates, maybe some less good mates and having a great feast with them. It's a fantastic picture and that's what it's going to be like, heaven, of people of all tribes and nations, friends, enemies, everyone coming together around Jesus, worshipping and praising him at this great final feast in heaven.

What a joy. Well, let me close in prayer for us. So, Father, we thank you for Jesus, Lord. We thank you that we escape that judgment through your Son.

[28 : 13] We thank you that you are a God who saves us, even though we might be as far away as the worst person ever, Lord.

We thank you that you have worked powerfully to save us. In Jesus' name, Amen.