

A dead boy was raised to life. The leprosy of an Aramean commander named Naaman was washed away in the waters of the Jordan River. Food that was tainted was made safe to eat again. Or when an iron axhead slipped off and fell into the water, it suddenly floated to the surface. Nothing less than miraculous, these examples pointed people to the power and authority God had given to Elisha, the prophet of the Lord. And when Elisha spoke the word of the Lord, he had their attention.

Sometimes it wasn't what the people or the leaders wanted to hear, but Elisha spoke the word faithfully. On another occasion, directly involved with the circumstances of our Old Testament reading for today, the Lord revealed to Elisha the secret plans of the Aramean army, which he then communicated to Israel's king. And when Israel avoided or countered these surprise attacks so consistently, it was brought to the attention of the king of Aram that it wasn't a mole or a spy within his own ranks, but the prophet of Israel who was giving away their strategies.

So what would you do, if you were the king of Aram, to get Elisha to shut his mouth? Exactly, you'd send out a search party to determine his location and then have stealth bombers finish the job. But Aram wasn't that technologically advanced, so the king sent soldiers with horses and chariots to hunt down Elisha. They located him in a town called Dothan, situated on a hill right between Jezreel and Samaria – both of which were royal residences of the king of Israel. This enemy force rolled right on through with little if any resistance! We're told, ***“¹⁴They went by night and surrounded the city.”***

We might wonder, *‘If God had warned Elisha about these other enemy attacks, wouldn't Elisha know about this one, too?’* Maybe he did, but the young servant who was with him obviously didn't know. And as far as he was concerned, this was a complete shock and surprise to both of them. Picture it: The sun hasn't come up yet, and there's still a bit of chill in the air. You step outside to fill your lungs with some fresh air, but instead it's as if you can hardly breathe. And what you see all around you practically knocks the wind out of you. ***“¹⁵When the 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.”*** He rushes back in to tell Elisha the first and only thing that comes to mind, *“Master, what are we going to do?”*

You notice he doesn't ask, *“Elisha, how is the Lord going to save us?”* Nor does he say, *“Whoa, this is going to be awesome, the way the Lord is going to show them who's boss!”* This guy is genuinely terrified and at a complete loss of what to do. Against an entire army with horses and chariots, the most logical thing for them to do would be to go quietly to the enemy. They knew this army had come for Elisha, and the army of Israel would be helpless to fight for them. Surrendering peacefully, on the other hand, might spare the lives of the residents of Dothan. But whatever they decided, they had to do it quick. And so he asked Elisha, *“What are we going to do?”*

Elisha said something to the servant that must have seemed very cryptic in that moment, ***“¹⁶Don't be afraid... Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”*** *‘Don't be afraid?’* (The Aramean army had us completely surrounded.) *‘Those who are with us are more than those who are with them?’* (Master, with all due respect, I count 'two,' and there's more than two out there.) As far as his servant could tell, Elisha was just trying to stay positive, to think happy thoughts, which is fine. But the reality of what he could see – the Aramean army surrounding the city – told him that there was no escape; there was no way this day would end well for either of them. There was nothing 'happy' about that.

But the way Elisha spoke indicated otherwise; he was so confident and unafraid. The writer to the Hebrews says, ***“Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see,”*** (11:1). And maybe that's why Elisha spoke the way he did. He was so sure and certain in the Lord's power to rescue them, in whatever manner that would take place, because he believed God's promises through faith. He believed that the Lord would be glorified through his servant, even if that meant being captured, led away and put to death. The way they woke up that morning was no accident or surprise, not to the Lord who already knows all things. Not to the Lord who is always in control. The Lord had opened Elisha's eyes to see the truth that, ***“If the Lord is for us, who can be against us?”*** (Ro 8:31).

Elisha wanted his servant to share the same confidence and fearless trust in the face of this apparent danger. ***“¹⁷And Elisha prayed, “O Lord, open his eyes so 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.”*** Why horses and chariots of fire? You may recall various instances in Old Testament history when the Lord made his presence known through the visible manifestation of fire. The flaming sword of the angel guarding the entrance to the Garden of Eden; the pillar of fire that led Israel through the wilderness by night; the fire that flashed from heaven to burn up Elijah's sacrifice on Mt. Carmel before the 450 prophets of Baal. In this case, however, the fire of God's presence was visible only to these two believers. The Aramean army sure didn't see that, or no doubt they would have run home screaming for their lives. These believers

witnessed God's majesty and power all around them, the fiery angel armies standing at the watch of God's command. By this miracle of God's gracious power, he opened their eyes to see the truth.

By that same gracious power, God has opened your eyes. He has called you out of the darkness of sin into the wonderful light of faith in Christ Jesus. One Christian author explained his Christian faith with reference to the sunrise, "...not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else." Through the light of faith, we see the whole world around us; we see the reality of ourselves. We are not the strong, self-sustaining and improving creatures that humanist philosophy suggests we are. Rather we are weak and helpless on our own, unable to find salvation or true meaning in our short-lived existence here on earth. Sin ravages our world and our very selves. YET through the light of faith, we also see the power, the protection and the peace that is ours in Christ. We see ourselves as redeemed children who are eternally loved by our Father in heaven, who has promised to take us there with him some day. Even with the pain and agony that goes hand-in-filthy-hand with this corrupted world, our all-knowing and all-loving God controls all things for our good. Can you see the hills full of God's fiery horses and chariots all around you, too? I know, right?

You are so blessed to live each day and every moment under the protection and strength of God's promises. He commands his angels to guard you, so that not even a hair falls from your head without his knowing about it. God has proven his infinite love for you by sending his own Son to be your Substitute and Savior from sin. Do you see his fiery horses and chariots all around you?

Honestly, it's not always so easy to see that, is it? And part of us wouldn't mind having a little more proof that God is right there in all his power and love. It's a little hard to see, though, when you're also watching your loved one suffering with some disease or disability, and the doctors don't always have the answers you're looking for. You know that God has saved you from your sins and will take you to heaven some day. But does it sometimes feel like you're just stuck here with all your personal issues, frustrations, and disappointments? Maybe you even pray that God would turn things around, so you have some sense of peace and relief again, but some of us just seem to keep on waiting. *'Is this really what God wants for me, because I can't see those horses and chariots too clearly any more?'*

When God's plans don't seem to match up with the plans and the solutions we've tried to devise, we get even more impatient and doubtful. It might even involve more physical and emotional pain than we were expecting, and it becomes even more difficult to see how this could possibly resemble God's solutions or deliverance. We wonder how God could let us suffer like this. We may even know the answer: that God wants to draw us closer to him through our struggles, to refine our faith through the fire of trials and temptations. But we don't like to have to struggle or to feel pain, especially when our faith is strong and refined enough already.

If you don't see the connection between your earthly pains and struggles and God's loving purpose to strengthen your faith, your eyes are closed. God has an army of angels all around you, but if the only reason to trust him is if he rescues you the way you want him to, then your eyes are still closed. And the next question is, *"What am I going to do?"* The question is as pointless as we are helpless, because we nothing we do will bring us any closer to the peace and security of our heavenly Father.

But Jesus can, and he has. In spite of our doubtful and blind hearts, God showed us his awesome power and death-defying love by sending someone even more powerful than an army of angels. When we and this entire world were surrounded and about to be wiped out by our spiritual enemies of sin, death and the Satan, God sent his own warrior Son to our rescue. Jesus knew that he would spill his blood on the battlefield, and there on the cross he ended the war. He made us safe and secure from the fear of our enemies. The Lord is with us...he is mighty in battle. The victorious Warrior took up his life again rising from the grave, to assure us that not even death can separate us from him. He is always with you.

By God's grace, you can see it, too! The hills of your life are filled with the fiery horses and chariots of God's powerful and loving presence. When the days seem cold and empty, remember the dear cross of your Savior! Hold onto those promises of God's love given and poured out for you through Jesus' own body and blood in his holy supper. He has washed you and made you his dear child through water and the word. Jesus' perfect sacrifice means complete forgiveness and peace with God. Let the Word of Christ open your eyes every day to fill you with the power and confidence of God's love, and whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all to the glory of God.