



Sermon – May 30, 2021
Wes Wilkinson

Verses Covered This Week

2 Kings 6:8 – 23

2 Timothy 4:17 - 18

Well, amen and good morning church family. It's a joy to get to be with you and open up the word this morning. Pastor Phillip and his family are on a, a Bethancourt reunion vacation. There's, I think he said 25 of them that are on vacation and they are enjoying some time of rest and relaxation. So I'm excited that, and blessed, that he asked me to stand in with you this morning. If you've got your Bibles, we're going to be in the book of 2 Kings. 2 Kings chapter 6. So, Old Testament. Go about halfway through the Old Testament, just before you get to Psalms, before you get to Chronicles. You'll find 1 and 2 Kings. And we are going to be in 2 Kings chapter 6. 2 Kings chapter 6.

Now, as you turn there, let me kind of set up the context of where we're going to find this story in 2 Kings today. You see, at this point in the history of Israel, Israel has split into two. There is the southern kingdom, called Judah. And there is the northern kingdom which is called Ephraim, or in our narrative, Israel. So Israel's not one unified nation. They've split into 2 over, after Solomon's reign. The northern kingdom of Israel is where we will find ourselves in this narrative. And this chapter comes after chapter 5 where a general of the Kingdom of Aram, or some of your Bibles may say Syria. But a general of the Kingdom of Aram has been stricken with leprosy and he is seeking a cure. And so he ends up seeking out Elisha and Elisha is able to provide him with God's healing and direction for healing. And Naaman is cured of his leprosy and goes back to the Kingdom of Aram. He actually takes 2, 2 load of dirt from Israel with him so in his foreign land, he may worship the one true God, the God of Israel. And it's on the heels of this event that we find ourselves in this narrative connected right to it. Now look at what it says, verse 8.

⁸Now the king of Aram was warring against Israel, that is, the king of Aram was making constant battle with the people of Israel. And he counselled his servants, his government officials, his military officers, and he said, "At such and such a place I will put my camp." ⁹The man of God sent word to the king of Israel saying, "Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Arameans are coming down there." ¹⁰The king of Israel sent to

that place about which the man of God had told him. Thus the man of God warned him, so the king guarded himself there more than once or twice.

So here's what you've got going. The king of Aram is making active attacks against Israel. He convenes with his military council and he says, "Here is this particular spot, this strategic place. We're going to go there and set up camp." Now we're not told how, but Elisha, the man of God, the prophet of God, has knowledge of these plans and how they would be harmful for Israel. And so Elisha warns the king of Israel and the king goes down, sends some troops, and they are able to thwart the actions of the king of Aram, not just once, that that statement there, more than once or twice, means this happened repeatedly. Such that, look in verse 11.

¹¹The heart of the king of Aram was enraged, became stormy, over this thing, and he called his servants, his counselors, and he said, "Which one of us, tell me, which one of you is for the king of Israel?"

So his only thought is, "One of my own counselors is a traitor. Which one of you has betrayed me?"

¹²But his counselors said, "No, my Lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words you speak in your bedroom."

Meaning, "King of Aram, there is nothing you say in any private corner of your life that Elisha does not know and is not actively sharing with the king of Israel."

¹³So with this revelation, the king of Aram said, "Go and find Elisha, that I may send and take him by force." So it was told to the king, "Behold, Elisha is in Dothan." ¹⁴So the king sent horses and chariots and a great army there and they came by night and surrounded the city.

So the king, finally understanding what's going on, he says, "Go get me Elisha." Now we don't know, is he going to try to kill Elisha? Is he simply going to try to capture Elisha and make Elisha and use Elisha's gifts and his mind? Use Elisha's gifts for his own good? We don't know. But what we do know is that they know where Elisha is, he's in this small town of Dothan which is about 10 miles north of the city of Samaria which is the capital of the northern kingdom. And in this small town, the king of Aram sends a large, vast, powerful, army. Horses, chariots, they're swift, they're mighty. He sends them by night. There's no opportunity for Elisha to see or prepare or defend or even the town of Dothan to defend itself. And it says they have encircled, they have completely and totally surrounded the city. This army is in complete control surrounding a defenseless town to take a seemingly defenseless man. But notice what happens.

¹⁵Now when the attendant of the man of God had risen early and gone out, behold, literally shock, wow, an army with horses and chariots was circling the city and the servant said to Elisha, "My master, what shall we do?" ¹⁶So Elisha answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

Now you can imagine, the language in the text when it speaks of this servant, this is a young man. We know from the previous chapter, Elisha's long-time servant, Gehazi, due to, due to his own greed was struck with leprosy and dismissed. So this is a new servant. This is a new young man who is engaged in ministry with Elisha. And you can imagine his shock. He rises, he's going about his normal routine, he looks out and sees an army. Therefore, his master, the shock, the terror, what shall we do? And can you imagine when he first hears Elisha's response, here's Elisha calm, cool, collected. "My young servant, do not fear. Those who are with us are more than those that are against us." "What do you mean, 'Those who are with us are more than those who are against us.'? There's nobody with us."

¹⁷Then Elisha prayed and he said, "O Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." And the Lord opened the servant's eyes and he saw, and behold, the mountain, that is, the hill that the city of Dothan sits on, was filled with horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

Elisha is aware that though this vast army gathers against him and against the purposes of God, he is aware that he is under the protection of the most-high, that there is an angelic army, angels who are called ministers of fire, that surround him. Chariots of fire that are around him and he is aware that there will not be, except by the allowance of God, anyone to touch his life. And he prays, "Lord, open the eyes of my servant." And the servant sees. Can you just imagine, church family, that moment for the servant? What a 180 of perspective. Look at the army here for our destruction. Can you hear the war cries? Can you hear the clanks as they're sharpening their swords, as they're sharpening their spears? And all of a sudden in a moment, a number even more numerable of flaming warriors, chariots of fire, angels whom if we heard, according to Scripture, if we were to see an angel appear in the midst of us today, the most likely reaction would be sheer terror at the splendor of the angel. Here they're surrounding, not just one, but multiple on multiple. So what happens?

¹⁸When the armies of Aram come down to him, Elisha prayed to the Lord, prays again, he says, "Strike this people, hit this people, this army, with blindness, I pray." So God struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.

So Elisha prays, here's the army, they've made it up to Elisha. He says, "God, blind them." Not physically remove their sight, but keep them from being able to see what they're actually after. And God does it.

¹⁹So Elisha, the man they're looking for, walks up to them and says, "This is not the way, this is not the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man you seek." And he proceeds to lead this army 10 miles down the road to Samaria, the capital of Israel.

And it says,

²⁰When they came into Samaria, Elisha prayed and said, "O Lord, open the eyes of these men that they may see." So the Lord opened their eyes and they saw, and behold, they were in the midst of Samaria.

Now imagine their shock. We were in control. We were surrounding the city. This man said, “I know where to take you.” And all of a sudden, we don’t know what happened, but hello, we are in the capital city of our enemy surrounded by our enemy’s armies.

²¹So the king of Israel, he sees them and he says to Elisha, “My father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?” Literally, “Shall I strike them? Shall I strike them?” ²²And Elisha answers, “You shall not strike them. Would you strike those from whom you have taken captive with your sword and with your bow? No, set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master.” ²³So the king prepared a great feast for them, when the army had eaten and drunk, he sent them away and they went back to their master.

What an interesting culmination of the story. You see, the king sees and very logically says, “Elisha should I strike them?” And Elisha’s comment, “Would you strike those that you have captured?” You can take it one of two ways. But essentially it means this. “King, these aren’t your captives to do with what you want. The Lord has already struck them. They’re the Lord’s captives. What you’re going to do is show them mercy. You are going to heed the injunction of your forefather, Solomon, who said, “I tell you, feed your enemy, give them drink. And in doing so you will heap coals of burning, heaps of burning coals upon their heads.” This moment of mercy takes place and it says:

The marauding bands of Arameans did not come again into the land of Israel.

This group of Arameans who were coming, not necessarily to wage war with all of Israel, but to come against the man of God, the person of God, the prophet of God, these armies who came to take him out, these armies do not come again after him into the land. So what are you and I to do with this? What is it? What is this interesting little story where, notice, the king of Aram is not named, the king of Israel is not named, the very next chapter, both are named. Chapters prior to this, both are named. What are we to do with this moment of, Lord, open eyes and seeing chariots of fire. Close eyes and, what’s the point? Church family, the point is this. If you and I are going to follow God as a man or woman of God, about God, about who He is, about His purposes, then you and I are going to face opposition. But we are not to fear the opposition. Instead, we are to see the protection of God so that we might carry out the mercy of God in the world. Do you see it there in the text? Do you see that first part? We are going to face opposition. As a person of God, as a man or woman of God, you and I need to accept the reality of opposition. Paul says in 2 Timothy, chapter 3, he says, “Timothy, understand, anyone who wishes to live a God-fearing life will suffer.” Jesus says all over the gospel, specifically we think of John, chapter 15, where He says, “You will be hated by the world because You are not of the world. You are Mine and the world hated Me before you because you are not of the world and the world does not know Me.” Church family, sometimes there is a reality as believers, I carried this when I graduated college, if I will just, if I will just do everything right to be at peace, if I will just be a peacemaker, if I will just carry myself correctly and aboveboard, then there won’t be opposition. False. If you and I endeavor to walk and follow Jesus Christ, we will face opposition. Period. There is no human who has lived a more perfect, peaceable life than Jesus Christ and He faced opposition the entirety of His life. In fact, the only place where you and I can stand for the purposes and will of God and find no opposition, but complete

acceptance, is heaven. So if you find yourself in that place, you have passed onto heaven or maybe you and I are not actually standing as unified with the purposes of God as we think.

Maybe we are accepted far too much by the world. You see, we're going to face opposition. Scripture shows us if we were to go throughout the rest of the canon of Scripture, we're going to see opposition from three sources. Opposition from the world. In this passage, it's the Arameans. These are the lost, the non-believing individuals of the world. It is the result of them not knowing the Lord and being blinded by the enemy. We see this all throughout time. Various cultures, various governments who are against, who persecute the faith. We see, if we're honest, maybe there is an encroaching fear as we watch, even in our own country, more and more and more turn hostile to Biblical Christianity. We face opposition from the world. We face opposition from within even the people of God. Here in this passage, the king of Israel says the only time he's shown to be somewhat peaceable to Elisha, in every other narrative, the king of Israel is actively opposed to Elisha. You see, unfortunately, even inside of the church, we're not immune to getting off track. And if you are going to be about the purposes of God, the will of God, be about how God does things, if you are going to be about that, then when believers begin to go off track, either in their beliefs or their actions, and embrace untruth and you stand up to that truth, you will face opposition. And ultimately, the reason we face oppositions from without, from those in the world, from those, is because ultimately we know, according to Ephesians 6, that our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against powers and principalities and rulers of darkness. It is a spiritual war.

We face an enemy who will attack us from without through the use of other people. We face an enemy who will attack us from within in terms of temptation and trial. If you set your heart to be a person of God, we have to settle it today. We will face opposition. Period. And if we don't, we will grow shocked and faint-hearted. We will be like the servant. "Oh my goodness! There's an army surrounding me. What's going on?" What's going on is exactly what happens when you seek to follow Christ in a broken world.

But this opposition, there's one other thing in the text if you notice it. It's not just that we face opposition, but this opposition has limits. Here in the text, Elisha's aware of everything that Aram is planning. Now you and I may not know the private thoughts of those who plot against the Christian faith, but the Lord sure does. It says all over Scripture, one place being Psalm 59, that they, the enemies of God, they return at evening, they howl like a dog, they go around the city, they belch forth with their mouths, swords are in the lips, they say, "Who hears us who knows our plans but You, O Lord, You laugh at them. You scoff at the nations." The Lord is sovereign over the reach of the opposition. So make no mistake. We will face opposition. But make no mistake, our God is greater than the opposition. Which is why we can move to the second aspect and we can make that choice not to fear. Because while we embrace and accept the reality of opposition, the reason we are not afraid is because we see the reality of God's protection. You look back in the text. Why is Elisha not afraid? Elisha's not afraid because he is clued into another reality. Elisha is able to comfort his servant and say, "Do not fear." Because Elisha sees a bigger picture. Elisha sees that God's protection is upon him. Church family, we find all throughout Scripture promises of God's protection. Psalm 34, the angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him and rescues them. Psalm 27, the Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defense of my life. Whom shall I dread? Though a host encamp against me, my heart will not fear; though war arise against me, in this

that the Lord is my defense and salvation, I shall be confident. That's why Proverbs 28 can say, the wicked flee when no one is pursuing, but the righteous are bold as a lion. They are bold as the lion because there is the protection of God for His purposes in and through His people. There is the protection God for His purposes in and through His people. God's purpose for Elisha's not done. Elisha is seeking to walk in the will of God, to live out that purpose. Though there is a threat and imminent danger on Elisha's life, it does not matter what army showed up around Dothan that day. It doesn't matter what bomb was dropped on Dothan that day. Elisha wasn't dying that day because God's purposes weren't finished in and through him. And he was walking in God's purpose. See, we find throughout Scripture that God's protection flows out of His providence. That is, His loving sovereign rule over all things. The fact that God is actually in control. Now when I say that, I don't want to leave you with this idea of a fatalistic mindset. That, "Well it doesn't matter what I do, whatever's going to be is going to be, there is no choice." That's not true. God's protection is not fatalistic. Choice does matter. God doesn't promise to protect us or spare us from earthly consequences when we choose to willfully ignore His will and walk off into foolish sin. We see that as an example in David and Bathsheba. Choices matter. Actions matter. Notice it said, "The Lord encamps around those who fear Him." But when you and I choose to live a life of fear of God, where we are submitted to who He is, where we seek to live out how He is, where it is His purpose and His will in our life that we are hungry for and seeking because we desire His glory, His protection reigns. Which means we can affirm that there is no more protected place to be than in the center of God's will. There is no more protected place which means we should hunger for His will. And here's the great news. Lest the fear crop up of, "Oh my goodness! I'm only protected if I'm in His will." Do you want to know who in all of existence wants you to know God's will the most? God. God's will is not something He's trying to play and dilly-dally with. God wants you to know His will. That's why He's given us His revealed will. It's why His eyes scour the earth, searching to and fro to the heart that is truly His. The issue is not whether He makes His will known; the issue is, maybe we don't always want His will as much as we say we do. And if the most protected place is really in His will, then just think about the ramifications of this. There's only one question to ask. Is this God's will or not? So when that comes to sending, parents, to sending my child on that mission trip, maybe to a dangerous place, realize this. If God wants your child sharing the gospel on the streets of a, of a closed down nation, they are more protected there than if they're playing ball down the street. It means this, when the thought comes of if I stand up against, against these unethical practices, against this injustice in my office, I may lose your job. Understand this. Losing your job standing for truth, for righteousness, is more protected than to keep your mouth shut, to pass a blind eye to things that are sinful and to have an income. It means that, students, when you write that paper and you know that professor is harsh against the things of Christianity and you would have to compromise your faith to agree with their opinion and you choose to take a stand and write what you know is true though it may cost you a letter grade, though it could compromise, you are more protected in that place standing for the purposes of God than if you walk by the control of the flesh of your eyes. You see, we can risk everything for His will because in His will we are protected. We find in Scripture God protects His people for His purposes. There is nothing that can touch the life of a child of God that does not pass through His hand. Read one person put it this way. When God's servants are in His will and doing His work, they are immortal until their work is done. Now understand, God's protection, this is not a statement that God's going to spare you any kind of danger, any kind of suffering, any kind of drama. It's not that statement. We see in 2 Timothy, chapter 4, listen to what Paul says. He says:

¹⁷The Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through my proclamation, through me the proclamation might be accomplished; that all the Gentiles might hear. I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. ¹⁸The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom.

You see, God's protection does not mean that if you're inside of God's will, in this case, Elisha spared. But God's protection doesn't always mean that we're spared hardship, real suffering. God's protection doesn't always mean, God's protection in Paul's life, did you catch what Paul said there? 2 Timothy 4 at the end of his life. God's protection is not that He will spare me death, but that not even death will separate me, but He will bring me home. Because I am protected for His purpose. I am protected for His place. But our aim is not just to know about God's protection, the call in the text is to see God's protection, to see His protection and here's how you and I see the protection of God in our life. By looking to the things which are unseen, not the things which are seen. By taking the word of God, by meditating on the word of God, on His holy character, by walking in faith, by seeing through the eyes of faith. It is an active choice to not believe what my eyes see physically, but to choose to see what the word of God tells me is there whether I see it or not. That's how I see His protection. That's how I see His protection in daily mundane things of life. Maybe where a closed door protected me from a dangerous path. Or maybe that's where I'll see His protection in supernatural ways. Think of Peter. The angel delivering him from the prison. But I'll give you this. Let's try 1960's Romania. The man who you might know by the name of Brother Andrew, seeking to smuggle Bibles to the church behind the iron curtain, has a car packed out with Bibles, no way to hide them. As he watches the cars in front of them literally get dismantled by the border guards, they're literally taking entire cars apart to see if there's any contraband. And as he's sitting watching, stuck in this line knowing there's no escape, this is his prayer. He prays and he says, "Lord, in my luggage I have Scripture that I want to take to Your children. When you were on the earth, You made blind eyes see. Now I pray, make seeing eyes blind. Do not let the guards see those things You do not want to see." And after every car in front of him has been strip-searched for an hour, he pulls up, he makes a decision, "Lord, I'm just going to put the Bibles out there for them to see and trust You to blind their eyes." He goes to get out of the car and the guard's knee keeps the door shut and he says, "Let me see your papers. Great." Sends him on in and proceeds to strip-search every other card behind him. And that's not one. I can give you dozens of stories like that that happened just in the last several decades that time does not permit. You see, you and I will see the protection of God when we walk by faith. And when we see the protection of God, we will be marked by a calm serenity just like Elisha. There will be a calmness. He does not stop. Threat does not stop him from carrying about and going about the Lord's work and purpose in his life. He is not worried; he is not troubled. He is focused on God's glory in the situation. Which is why we see he does not cower to the king of Israel. Here's an opportunity for him to make buddy buddy with the king of Israel. "Yeah, king, take out these guys. I brought them to you." He doesn't do that. It's why he's concerned and he doesn't rebuke his servant. But he calls him and commands him, "Do not be afraid." And he prays for this young man of the Lord. And it's why we'll see he displays the mercy of God to his enemies; he is focused on the greatness of God and being obedient to the Lord. Because he is not afraid by the threat. He is confident of the Lord's protection.

Which is why when you see at the end. I was very surprised as I worked through this text. Because I've heard this story before. Maybe many of you have. And we think of, "Lord open the eyes" and that being the center point. But then it ends with this display of unbelievable mercy. These are enemies. They've been captured. Yet in an act living out of Romans 12, Elisha does not repay evil for evil. But he seeks to be at peace with all men. He does not take revenge, but he leaves vengeance to the Lord. And he sees his enemy is hungry so he feeds them. He sees his enemy is thirsty so he gives them a drink. And in doing so he heaps burning coals on their heads. He does not overcome with evil, but overcomes evil with good. Here's what Elisha does. He lives out what Jesus commands in Matthew, chapter 5. To love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. See, church family, the reality is, we are going to be opposed if we are going to walk with God. And if we walk with God, the only way to not live in fear of that opposition as we see it encircling around us, is to be confident with eyes of faith in seeing His protection. And when we see His protection, what it enables us to do is to demonstrate mercy to a hostile, unbelieving world. And I would argue, church family, that that's the key here in this text. You and I cannot show mercy to those who would be hostile against us if we are not finding our security in the protection of God. Because here's the deal. When you show mercy to a hostile party, there's no guarantee they'll accept it. Because these same Arameans who were shown mercy here, and the very next verse will be found besieging Israel. See, there's no guarantee that when mercy is shown, that it will be received. There's no guarantee that when mercy is shown that a life will be transformed. There is an inherent danger in showing mercy that I may not be safe in this world. And if my security is only a security of this world, I will never venture to show mercy to those who are hostile. So just process this with me. Perhaps as we watch our culture become greater and greater in its opposition and hostility to the things of God, are the reactions of anger, of animosity, that at times come from the mouths and fingers of believers really righteous anger? Or is it exposing our fear? Because for far too long, we have looked to the walls of our nation for our protection and not the sovereign hand of heaven. Because, church family, make no mistake. We need to be clear. The government of the United States of America is not the kingdom of heaven. The president is not God Almighty. Congress is not the angelic hosts and this is not our home. And our purpose is not to make much of this country. It's not to make much of our own lives. Our purpose is the glory of God and the glory of God came into this world filled with hostility. Because all of us were by nature children of wrath and the glory of God went on the cross and bled out and showed mercy. And as you think in your mind of someone, whether it's someone in your own job who is opposing, whether it is, whether it's a politician that comes to your mind that you feel the fear of threat of opposition, whether it is whoever comes to your mind, understand this. One, I'm not advocating we don't stand for truth in the public sphere. That's not what I'm saying. What I am saying is that even when we advocate, we show mercy to a hostile, unbelieving world because whoever that opponent is that comes to your mind, Jesus bled just as much out of love for them as He did for you and as He did for me. This is a world that is desperate, in need of mercy. It is a world that is blind. But you know what? You know the only thing that can open blind eyes? The mercy of God. And you and I are the ambassadors of God to both proclaim and demonstrate the mercy of God to the world. And if we proclaim mercy, but don't show mercy, we're noisy gongs, we're clanging symbols. But if we show mercy and don't tell people the reason for our mercy, then that's just as pointless too. Perhaps at times we have forgotten what Titus says when he says, church family, we were once ourselves foolish, disobedient. We were once deceived. We were once enslaved to various lusts and fashions and pleasures. _____ once spent his life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of our God and Savior

and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us. Not on the basis of what we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy. Church family, you and I are called to be men and women of God who embrace God for who He is. Who walk out His purposes how He is. Who embrace and accept the fact that we will live our lives opposed if we walk with God, but who will not fear that opposition because we know we are protected by God for His purposes for all eternity. And so in the power and the strength and conviction of that protection we find by the Holy Spirit within us the power to love our enemy. To pray for those who persecute. To take the most hostile of opposition and to display mercy as we have received mercy.

In college I served for three years as an RA and in RA training one year they said, they were telling us our budgets and stuff and they said, "Now here's, we give you X-amount of money to decorate your hall. Oh, but guys, y'all don't ever do that." And we said, "Hold up, you're going to give us free money. We will take free money. We will decorate if we get free money." So we proceeded to decorate the hall. And as time went on, I designed these decorations for the hall. And as you walked in the hall, the theme was men of God. And on every wall there was essentially a plaque that had the picture of a man of God and a biography about these men of God, these great men of faith who stepped out and walked with God. And at the end of the hallway, there was a mirror right before you left the dorm. And on that mirror, I put the outline of a face with a question mark in the middle. And the question was simply this. Whose man will you be? The challenge was, every time the students walked out of the dorm, I wanted those young men to be challenged with, or when you walk out those doors and into that world, whose will you be? Church family, when you and I leave today and we walk out those doors into a hostile world, whose man or woman will we be? Will we be the kind of men and women who are so about the Lord and His purposes that we don't faint at opposition? We don't fear it because we are secured, resting and seeing the protection of God and we walk out as ambassadors of mercy. Oh, church family, may it be.

Pray with me.

Father, Lord I just confess again anew, Lord, when I read through this passage I am convicted of so many ways, so many places where fears and worries consume my life because I see only through eyes of mere flesh. God, forgive me, forgive me for the ways that though I know of Your protection, I don't always see it. And Lord, forgive me for the ways that I'm not seeing it. Perhaps I have missed opportunities to proclaim and demonstrate Your mercy to a world that is in desperate need. Holy Spirit, I know You're here. I know You're moving. You wrestle with each and every one of our hearts. So, Holy Spirit, as You move on hearts today, whatever it is You are stirring, may we be quick to respond. Jesus it is in Your sweet and precious name I pray. Amen.