

## LORD, OPEN OUR EYES

2 Kings 6:8-17 | Ninth Sunday after Pentecost | July 19/22, 2018

*“Open his eyes, LORD, so 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.*

### **Juva, Jesu!**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, I served as a vicar at Grace in Falls Church, Virginia. There was a dear lady in that congregation named Evelyn Jenkinson. Her husband had retired from the Army as a full colonel and was buried with honor at Arlington National Cemetery. Because of this, Evelyn had special access to that hallowed ground. And so on May 27, 1996 Evelyn took me to the special Memorial Day ceremonies at Arlington Cemetery. The guest speaker that day was The Honorable William Jefferson Clinton, President of the United States.

Even though this was pre-9/11, security was tight. We had to pass through not one, but two metal detectors. Our bags were carefully searched. The Secret Service presence was heavy. I remember sitting in the large crowd watching as several two-man sniper teams took their positions on surrounding buildings, one armed with high-powered binoculars, the other with a high-powered rifle. I thought to myself: Is there anyone in the world with better care and protection than the President of the United States?

Yes, there is! Every single believer in our Lord Jesus Christ. Today, we pray as Elisha prayed: OPEN OUR EYES, LORD, (I) to see

your might, and (II) to see your mercy.

### **I. To See Your Might**

The Israelites and the Arameans were not getting along. Aram was located northeast of Israel in present-day Syria. You might remember the story of Naaman. He was a commander in the army of Aram. The prophet Elisha healed of leprosy. At this time the King of Aram himself was out leading his troops in battle against Israel. He was trying to find the Israelite army and engage them in battle.

But the king had a problem. Israel always seemed to be one step ahead of him. The king was furious about this. He assumed that one of his own men was a traitor. His problem wasn't a traitor but a prophet. The Lord told Elisha about the movements of Aram's army. Elisha warned Israel's king. In this way they were able to avoid battle. This was well-known in Aram's army.

The king couldn't let this continue. So he sent out his spies to find Elisha. They found him at a place called Dothan, about 11 miles north of Samaria, where Israel's royal palace was located at this time. The King sent some of his crack troops and the tanks of that day, horses and chariots, and surrounded the city.

When Elisha's servant got up early in the morning, he saw that they were surrounded and he was terrified. **"Oh, my lord, what shall we do?"** Elisha encouraged him. **"Don't be afraid. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."** And then he prayed: **"Open his eyes, LORD, so that he may see."** What did the servant see? Horses and chariots of fire!

**[PHOTO]** Take a look at the screen. What you are looking at is an Israeli *Merkava* Mark IV main battle tank, widely considered one of the best tanks in the world. It is armed with a 120mm smooth bore cannon, two 7.62mm machine guns as well as a 50 caliber machine gun and 60mm mortar. It has tough modular armor that can be quickly repaired, and a 1,500 horsepower turbocharged diesel engine that can move this 72-ton beast at over 40 MPH. The *Merkava* is a tough, capable and deadly weapon.

Why am I telling you about an Israeli tank? Because *Merkava* is the Hebrew word for "chariot." A form of that same word is used in our text. The king of Aram had horses and chariots. Humanly speaking, Elisha and his servant didn't stand a chance. They were vastly outnumbered and outgunned. But fiery horses and chariots stood between them and their enemies. They had an invisible army of angels fighting on their side. All the Israeli tanks in the world are nothing compared to the power of just one of God's holy angels. God allowed the servant to see the usually-invisible angels. Now it was clear: The Arameans were the

ones outnumbered and outgunned. They didn't stand a chance.

But aren't we often just like that servant. We look around us and we see nothing but danger and disaster. We worry about our health. What if I get cancer? What if have a heart attack? We worry about our kids? Who's going to watch over them while they're away at college? What if they get into an accident? We worry about violence? What if my house is robbed? What if someone attacks me? So often we are filled with fear because we aren't focused on God's gracious promises, because we've taken our eyes off Jesus.

Of course bad things do happen to believers. This is a dangerous world. But, friends, never forget: no one is better protected than a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to some Scripture on the matter. Psalm 34:7: **The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.** Psalm 91:11-12: **He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.** Jesus once said that there are legions of these angels, thousands upon thousands of them (Matthew 26:53). And the writer to the Hebrews tells us that these angels are **ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation.** Like heavenly police God has sent them to protect and serve us.

Protect us from what? From everything and everyone that would seek to harm us.

Certainly the angels protect us from physical harm. Who of us haven't had the experience of narrowly avoiding an auto accident? Who of us haven't found our kids doing things that should have killed them but somehow didn't? God's angels were at work!

The physical realm is not the only place they work. Paul tells us that **our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms** (Ephesians 6:14). Make no mistake – though we can't see it, evil surrounds us! Satan and his demons are constantly on the offensive against us. Left on our own, they would make quick work of us. But we are not on our own. The Lord himself is with us, and he sends his holy angels, mighty spiritual servants, to guard and protect us, body and soul.

When physical harm threatens you, when spiritual forces are attacking, when all you can see is danger and disaster, then pray: "Lord, open my eyes. Open my eyes to see your might. Remind me of the mighty angelic army that surrounds me."

Of course, it isn't just God's might that protects us. It's also his mercy.

## **II. To See Your Mercy**

How did we get to be such well-protected people? Why did God assign angelic body guards to watch over us? Is there something special about us, something in us that causes him to look at us

differently? Is it because of our faithfulness to God's ways and our obedience to his commands? Hardly! If it was based on our worthiness we couldn't even earn so much as a squirt gun for our protection.

No, we are surrounded by such might because of God's mercy. Hear that passage from Hebrews one more time: **Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?** Those who will inherit salvation – that's us! Note that we inherit salvation. We don't earn it. It's God's gift to us.

But it is earned. It's earned not by us, but by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He earned it for us by living obediently in our place, keeping everyone of God's commands with flawless perfection. He earned it for us shedding his perfect blood for us on Calvary's cross, the atoning sacrifice that pays for all of our sins. He sealed it by rising victoriously from the grave on the third day, a victory that he shares with us.

As if sending his Son to be our perfect Substitute and Savior, to earn forgiveness and eternal life for us, wasn't enough grace and mercy, God also sent his Spirit into our hearts through Word and Sacrament to give us faith in his Son. By God's grace alone we are believers, those who will inherit salvation. And so we also enjoy the service of God's secret agents, his mighty angels.

Does this mean that Christians should expect everything in life to go just swimmingly, that we will avoid all

problems and pain, that will never get hurt or sick? Of course not! You know that. But it does mean that God is with us and that he is watching over us in every time of danger or difficulty. He is **an ever-present help in trouble** (Psalm 46:1).

We pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Deliver us from evil." How does God answer that prayer? There are really four ways. God can keep evil away from us completely. Often his angels fend off evil we didn't even know about. He can give us strength to endure trial and trouble. Through his Word he strengthens our faith to survive difficult days. He can use pain and problems for our eternal good. He promises to do just that. Ultimately, God delivers us from evil completely when he takes us to heaven. As we heard from Paul already today: **The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom** (2 Timothy 4:18). His confidence is our confidence in Christ.

One of my favorite bands has a song called "Workin' Them Angels." The story behind it is kind of humorous. The band's drummer and lyricist, was traveling across country on his motorcycle and stopped at a rest area. There he overheard a couple arguing loudly. Apparently the wife was really upset about her husband's driving. She told, "Boy, you were really workin' them angels." In other words, his driving was so bad that the angels had to work overtime to protect them.

I think we can relate. We are surrounded by dangers, physical and spiritual. Some

we bring on ourselves, some are caused by others. In this dark and dangerous world what a comfort to know that God's angels won't stop working for us. They won't stop until we are safe in heaven with the one who shed his blood to bring us there. Until then we pray: "Lord, open our eyes to see your might and your mercy!" God grant us all open eyes and hearts filled with faith in his promises. Amen.

**S.D.G.**