

2 Kings 6:15-17.

¹⁵ When 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. "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked. ¹⁶ "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." ¹⁷ And 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.

The Lord opens our eyes to his reassuring presence.

- 1. His powerful presence calms our fears.**
- 2. His loving presence moves us to obey.**

Before Jesus ascended into heaven he reassured his disciples, he assured his disciples of all time, that even though he would leave this earth physically he will be with us always to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:20). Our risen Lord promises that he will be with his people always no matter the circumstances on this earth.

In our lesson for today from the Old Testament God revealed his almighty presence in a remarkable display of power. When threatened by enemy forces suddenly chariots of fire surrounded the prophet Elisha and it became clear that God was with his servant. It was a magnificent display that illustrated a basic bible truth that is repeated time and again in both the Old Testament and the New: God is with his people.

This simple truth brought tremendous comfort to God's people throughout the centuries and it is comfort that is still very much needed today. The world in which we live often tries to make God's people feel outnumbered and outmatched. The mighty influence of sin surrounds us and we are pressured to surrender our beliefs and give in to the ways of the world. But our Lord is there, he is always there, to reassure us that we do not have to shake in terror at the sight of evil and rampant immorality that daily surrounds us. We don't have to give in to pressure or surrender our beliefs. Instead we can stand firm and live for God and in joyful obedience to his Word because the LORD is with us. The risen Lord opens our eyes so that we may see that God is with us and "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31)

And so today, the Lord opens our eyes so that we may see his reassuring presence. His powerful presence calms our fears. His loving presence moves us to obey.

This past week there was a big happening in the world of professional sports that demonstrated how the world today can make a Christian who obeys what the Bible says feel outmatched and overpowered. Jason Collins, a NBA basketball player, became the first male athlete of a major professional sport to publicly announce that he is gay while he is still an active player. Much of the media attention given to him and his announcement was positive, even celebratory, in its tone. Words like “courageous” and “groundbreaking” were used to support this man’s decision to embrace his lifestyle and share it with the world. His announcement was met with much worldly praise from the majority of the press and media sources that covered this “landmark” happening in professional sports.

One Christian reporter, however, seemed to stand alone in his view of this announcement. When asked his opinion - on a nationally televised program - about a fellow Christian making such an announcement this reporter shocked and upset many people when he said this, *“I’m a Christian. I don’t agree with homosexuality. I think it’s a sin, as I think all sex outside of marriage between a man and a woman is, “if you’re openly living in unrepentant sin, whatever it may be, not just homosexuality — adultery, fornication, premarital sex between heterosexuals — I believe that’s walking in open rebellion to God and Jesus Christ”.* This statement stood in bold contrast to all other news reports on this matter, but this particular reporter calmly expressed his beliefs and did not back down. He obeyed his Lord even under intense scrutiny.

For his comments the reporter, named Chris Broussard, was blasted and lambasted by many. There were plenty of people that were furious. They called his comments out of place. They called him a bigot and intolerant and insisted that he should lose his job for such hateful remarks. In the wake of this media firestorm, however, Broussard has also reported an outpouring of support from Christians throughout the country and even throughout the world. This is just one example of how in our world today God’s people can feel outnumbered and may be pressured to surrender and compromise their beliefs, but God is there to give his people strength. God is with his people. His powerful presence calms our fears and moves us to gladly obey him.

Now I doubt that you are ever going to be surrounded by a mighty enemy force like Elisha was. And it is not very likely that you would be put under the microscope of nationally televised broadcast during which you would be called upon to make a bold and public confession. But there will be situations when you will feel the pressure and the anxiety of being surrounded by and influenced by the evils of this

world. There will be the temptation to surrender, to see yourself as being outmatched or outnumbered and unable to overcome. We have been in such situations before and - let's face it - we have often not fared well. We have all been cornered and surrounded by some evil, by some temptation. You felt alone and outmatched, outnumbered and overpowered; and you gave in.

We have all been there, in such a situation, because we are sinful. We are weak. We are prone to crumble under the pressures of evil instead of putting our complete trust in God. And so what are we to do when evil comes knocking or pounding on our door! What are we to do when it looks like we are outnumbered, when the evils of this world are all around us, when the powerful influence of sin surrounds our hearts and minds looking to overtake us? What are we to do?

Does the teenage boy who hears his friends talk about sinful prom night activities change his views about what is right or what is wrong? Does the Christian woman who listens to her co-workers spread nasty rumors and repeatedly slander others speak up or does she chip in her two cents? What are we to do? Do we surrender? Do we give in and back off our morals? Do we ignore what our God tells us in his Word? Do we ignore his loving command to obey those in authority, to refrain from the spread of false and hurtful testimony against our neighbor, to avoid drunkenness and all forms of immorality; do we ignore all those commands of our loving heavenly father, just because it seems that everyone else is doing it? Do we alter our positions on sex, marriage, homosexuality, or abortion because popular opinion seems to have shifted?

Oh that the Lord might open our eyes to see that we are not outnumbered! May the Lord open the eyes of his servants young and old so that we may see that he is with us! What tremendous comfort and power this simple promise gives to us: God is with us. Even when we are surrounded by the evil of this world, when immorality runs rampant, when society flaunts its godlessness, God assures us that He is with his people. When we feel alone the Lord directs us to the fellowship and unity that is found in fellow believers. Through the unity of faith we are connected to our fellow believers in this congregation, and we are connected to the body of Christ, that is, all believers everywhere – the Holy Church of God. There is strength in those numbers. There is confidence in this truth: we are not alone. We have Christ. We have each other. He calms our troubled hearts. He leads us to trust in him and moves us to gladly obey him. God is with us. And if that wasn't already enough the Lord also assures us in his Word that he sends his angels to attend to us. He commands his mighty angels to watch over his believers.

That brings us back to our text. The King of Aram was enraged that Elisha was able to frustrate his plans to attack the King of Israel and so he sent a mighty force to kill the man of God. The king's forces were numerous and strong, not just fighting

men, but horses and chariots. They went by night and surrounded the city of Dothan where Elisha was. And so when Elisha's servant awoke he opened his eyes to this terrible sight that threw him into such fear that he exclaimed to Elisha, **"My lord, what shall we do?"** Calmly and confidently Elisha spoke to his servant these words, which are words that we would do well to store away in our hearts and minds for repeated use. **"Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."** ¹⁷ **And [then] Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see."** The Lord heard the prayer of his prophet and in love the LORD allowed the servant of Elisha to see an army of mighty angels that are usually hidden from sight. The Word of God tells us, **The LORD opened the servant's eyes... He looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.** The servant's sudden fear now turned to immediate wonder, amazement, comfort and confidence. The Lord was, indeed, with his people.

God tells us in his word that when the mighty enemy plots to destroy God's people, God defends them through his invisible servants, the angels. God sent his angels to rescue Lot from the doomed city of Sodom, and now God's angels rescued Elisha and his servant. God sends his mighty angels to protect his believers. We too are included in this promise and therefore we can apply to ourselves these additional words of comfort from the psalms, **"The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them" (Psalm 34:7). He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; (Psalm 91:11).** God's angels are mighty in power and majestic in number, thousands upon thousands of angels attend to our physical and spiritual well-being. We are God's people and he makes sure that we are protected from the forces of evil. What comfort and power, what confidence and peace the Lord delivers to us through his Word!

O Lord, open our eyes so that we may see that, **"Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."** God's mighty band of angels attends to our needs. They protect us from the threats of the evil one and they are there to keep us safely above the influence of this evil world. We are not outnumbered. We are not alone. We are guarded by mighty angels. We are connected to our fellow believers through faith. And, best of all, God is with us.

What great comfort this little phrase gives: God is with us. Do not be let your hearts be troubled, but instead trust in God and take heart! Live your faith confidently! Love Jesus and follow his commands! And pray that the Lord would daily open the eyes of our hearts so that we may see his reassuring presence which calms our fears and moves us to love Jesus and gladly obey his commands. Amen.