



## "Elisha"

### Sermon Series: "Witnesses to God's Larger Story"

2 Kings 6:8-23

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#### 2 Kings 6:8-23 Elisha Traps Blinded Arameans

(NIV)

<sup>8</sup> 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."

<sup>9</sup> The man of God sent word to the king of Israel: "Beware of passing that place, because the Arameans are going down there." <sup>10</sup> 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 his guard in such places.

<sup>11</sup> This enraged the king of Aram. He summoned his officers and demanded of them, "Will you not tell me which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?"

<sup>12</sup> "None of us, my lord the king," said one of his officers, "but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom."

<sup>13</sup> "Go, find out where he is," the king ordered, "so I can send men and capture him." The report came back: "He is in Dothan." <sup>14</sup> Then he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city.

<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

<sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> As the enemy came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, "Strike these people with blindness." So he struck them with blindness, as Elisha had asked.

<sup>19</sup> Elisha told them, "This is not the road and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will lead you to the man you are looking for." And he led them to Samaria.

<sup>20</sup> After they entered the city, Elisha said, "LORD, open the eyes of these men so they can see." Then the LORD opened their eyes and they looked, and there they were, inside Samaria.

<sup>21</sup> When the king of Israel saw them, he asked Elisha, "Shall I kill them, my father? Shall I kill them?"

<sup>22</sup> "Do not kill them," he answered. "Would you kill men 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." <sup>23</sup> 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.

Well good morning everyone. I'm so happy to be with you and share from this interesting odd passage that we have with us today. We have just concluded our study of Mark and now for the month of August alone we have chosen to do something different. We are going to look at different Old Testament passages that speak to this idea of there being a bigger story. Before I get to the sermon, let us pray.

*God we thank you for Your Word. We thank you for your scripture and how it is the light to our life and path. I pray Lord a simple prayer that Elisha prayer: Open our eyes so that we might see you and we might understand you. Give us wisdom and understanding. I pray that you take my broken thoughts and broken words and that you would be there and you would teach and instruct – you know our hearts, you know our needs, so, Lord speak to us, we pray. Amen.*



Many of you may have never heard of a man Larry Walters. I'm sure that most of you haven't. But his famous act will most definitely divide us this morning. Some of you after hearing the story will think he is senile or crazy and others of you might respect and admire him, maybe one day just to be like him. It is interesting how stories like this tend to divide us. Larry Walters was a truck driver who lived in San Pedro, California. In 1982 he live out a live-long dream. At the age of 13, Larry was walking by an army military store and saw these gigantic helium weather balloons. Being a child and being fascinated with small helium balloons, he had the thought wondering what these gigantic helium balloons could lift. Twenty years went by and he fulfilled his dream on July 3, 1982 by attaching these gigantic helium balloons to a lawn chair and taking flight.

On that July afternoon, Larry tied 42 weather balloons filled with helium to a Sears's lawn chair in the backyard of his girlfriend's house and anchored himself to a friend's Jeep. He took with him a pellet gun, a CB radio, sandwiches, cold beer and a camera. Things didn't quite work out for Larry though after his crew cut the first tether, the 2<sup>nd</sup> one snapped immediately and Larry shot into the Los Angeles' sky at over 1,000 ft. per minute. So fast was his ascent, that he lost his glasses. He then climbed to up over 16,000 feet in the air on his little lawn chair. For several hours, he drifted in the cold air near the Los Angeles and Long Beach Airports. A TWA pilot first spotted Larry and radioed the tower that he was passing a guy in a lawn chair at 16,000 feet.

After his time in the sky, Larry shot several of the balloons with his pellet gun and then actually dropped it overboard. He descended slowly until the balloon cables that were dangling got caught in a power line causing a black out in the Long Beach neighborhood for over twenty minutes. As you might imagine, he was immediately arrested waiting members of the Long Beach Police Department and then received \$4,000 in fines by the fines by the FAA. In the end, Larry traveled from San Pedro, California to Long Beach on a lawn chair.

Since then, of course, any idiotic action that happens in this world inspires others to emerge as you might imagine. A 47-year old gas station owner, Kent Couch traveled 193 miles on his lawn chair from Bend, Oregon and landing near the Idaho border in his little lawn chair. You almost expect something like that to happen in Austin, right?

One of my favorites about this story is after this all subdued a newspaper report found Larry and asked him the question that my mom asked me so many different times, "Why did you choose to do this?" Larry's answer, I thought was so profound, as you might imagine, "I man just can't sit around." Which strikes me as humorous in a couple of ways because he did just sit around right?

What Larry was speaking about I think is something that many of us deal with in our life – this idea and longing to make your days count for something. As our life goes on, the routine and mundane cycle of every single day seem almost to put us in a coma and someone like Larry being a truck driver who seemed to also to sit around a whole lot, longed to do something more, something bigger. You know make his carpe diem – seizing the day - to make something more out of his life. I think within many of us, if not all of us, have the longing to make our days count for something, to steal the day and to experience something bigger than we might be experiencing on this day.

**WHPC's mission statement says this: "We exist to invite people into God's larger story as we follow Christ together."** What that speaks to is that there is a greater story that you and I might be living into. Maybe we don't know and we could be the lead role in our small story or perhaps we could join God in His grand story extending through all ages that experiences grand mystery, beauty and truth. We've been invited into that larger story.



**What we have here today in this passage is a very odd story of their being another reality, something bigger, deeper and truer that was happening than what the eyes could see.** For those of you like the Mafia mobster movies, you will also like this for a couple of the scenes that might hit home for you. We find here that each time the King of Aram would stage a battle that the Prophet Elisha would know about it and inform Israel's king. Verse 9 says,

<sup>9</sup> The man of God sent word to the king of Israel: "Beware of passing that place, because the Arameans are going down there." <sup>10</sup> 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 his guard in such places.

Much like a gangster movie has you could imagine. The King of Aram called together all these different officials and said, "Which one of you are routing me out?" Which one of you are being disloyal. The officers advised that none of them were being the informants and the King in Verse 11 says,

<sup>11</sup> This enraged the king of Aram. He summoned his officers and demanded of them, "Will you not tell me which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?" <sup>12</sup> "None of us, my lord the king," said one of his officers, "but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom." <sup>13</sup> "Go, find out where he is," the king ordered, "so I can send men and capture him." The report came back: "He is in Dothan."

One of the only significant things that happened in this place, Dothan, for Old Testament scholars is they will see that Dothan is the place that Joseph was betrayed by his brothers. It is a place where he was given over by his brothers into slavery – a place of regret and of this great horrendous crime that happened that harbored bitterness that extended on for his family. So the king in Verse 14 says,

<sup>14</sup> Then he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city.

Now, as I look at this passage, if Elisha knew of the attacks before that happened against the king of Israel, it leads me to wonder if he knew of the attack that was going to happen on himself? I would think so. I would think if Elisha knew the very words in his own bedroom, he probably knew what was going to happen on this evening. Yet, he doesn't seem to change anything. He doesn't call on the army of the king of Israel to come and protect him. He just allows it to happen. For his poor servant, that very night he was sleeping sound when he was going to be attacked. It makes me wonder why did he not tell the servant? Why didn't they sneak out? Why didn't he call upon the troops? I think the reason is because Elisha wanted his servant to have a life-long lesson birthed that morning. Even though danger was there, that he was going to be silent so that something might come from it.

I think many of us might be asking the same question. God if you knew the danger that was on my doorstep, why did you remain silent? If you knew the sickness that I was going to have, the cancer, the hardships that I was about to step into? If you knew that I was going to lose my job, my boyfriend/girlfriend, spouse – why didn't you let me know ahead of time? Why didn't you allow me to prepare? Why didn't you sweep in and protect me without me even knowing it? I think the same lesson that Elisha wanted his servant to have, God might desire for us to have – that there is suffering and it may come and go, but something that we have might never be taken.

Verse 15,



<sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

You can just imagine the servant looking around asking, who is with us.

<sup>17</sup> 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.

I enjoy imagining this. In my mind's eye of what it must have been like for the servant to be standing there in utter fear and then in a split second to have a different kind of fear out of reverence and power and the presence of God for this individual – from one extreme to another.

For those who have ever been to Carlsbad Caverns – you know of this experience. When you go there, you can go on one of the tours where a trooper will take you from the outdoor-lighted environment and he will take you on the elevator – you will go down and into this chamber and all the lights will be turned off. Darkness is something that we don't experience that often, even when our lights are not on in our home where there are different street lights and different things coming in. But, they walk in this complete darkness and you just follow the steps of the person in front of you. You can't see a single thing and as you stand there the trooper reaches down and turns on the lights and you all of a sudden realize that you are in this grand majestic chamber with these stalagmites and stalactites that have grown for thousands of year surrounding you. It is almost like this cathedral of sorts. It is just a beautiful, powerful presence. But, the experience of it is going from utter darkness and then in a second seeing where you are.

For us in our Christian life, I think we long for that – to have the eternal curtain pulled back. For the servant that is what seemed to happen for just this one moment, to have this eternal curtain pulled back so that he could see the reality that was there, that didn't quite meet the human eyes. For that moment the larger story was unveiled. His eyes were open so that he might see.

So, the lesson that Elisha wanted his servant to learn, that might be the same for us – **Our eyes might see that we every right to be imprisoned to fear, but there is another reality here among us, that in the presence of suffering and oppression that we have the right to call about Emmanuel, God with us.** We believe that God is hear among us in our church services and in our religious duties that we do throughout the week, but one thing that we know for sure in the Christian life is that God has chosen to be especially present for those who are in the midst of suffering and of hardship – that God has chosen to be even more present there. Isn't that what the cross was about – that God didn't choose to save us from a distance or pronounce our forgiveness, but that He choose to extend grace and forgiveness through his own suffering and in doing so He made it known that he is the God of the suffer, the God that seems to be with those who are going through oppression and difficulties and this is why I think we call love Him – that God is not the puppeteer from a distance, but He has chosen to walk into the midst of the suffering to not only save us from our sins, but to same us from the hopelessness that we might feel in being alone in our sufferings. If only we had eyes to see that Jesus more and more. If only we had eyes to see that reality. So, the interesting thing for me in this is to wonder, how come Elisha's perspective was so very different from the servant? I mean they were both there, right? They both



were present, but they seemed to have difficulty seeing the same thing. They have the same situation, but just two different realities.

To answer that question I want to share about a book that my wife and I recently read. It is called, "The Art of Racing in the Rain." It is fantastic book for those people who own dogs, because it is a story told from the perspective of a dog and if you are dog owner, you know what I mean by the fact that I have prayed and prayed that our dog, Marcus, would just talk to me for one day. I just want to know what he is thinking, I long to hear from him. Sometimes when I can home, I don't go to the door first, I kind of peak through the window and just hoping that I would see Marcus at like the grill, you know like making pancakes or something. I want it so badly and I don't think it is going to happen.

However, this book is story about this family and it is told from perspective of a dog. This dog loves his owner and his owner is a racecar driver. The story is not a children's story at all, it is a bit more for adults because this dog is kind of like this philosopher, but he using racing as the frame in which he speaks about life. One of his quotes that kept on coming up was this, **"In racing they say you car goes where your eyes go.** The driver who cannot tear his eyes away from the walls, spins out of control and will meet that wall. The driver who looks down at the track because he feels his tires break free will regain control of his vehicle." This was statement was repeated over and over in this book – "The car goes where the eyes go."

What that is saying is **whatever you allow yourself to fixate upon, that is where you will end up being driven to, that is where you will be drawn to.** The difficulty for you and I, in this world, we have so many different things and voices and people who are depending our attention, all day long, just calling for our attention and yet it is so powerful where we allow our attention to rest, because wherever that is that is where our heart will go eventually. That is where we will end up going eventually. There is a power in what we allow our perspective to grab onto. For those who are in the midst of suffering, in the midst of hardship, it is so easy to focus on the questions and the restlessness that is here and that God might be calling for us to draw our attention to something more eternal, more stable, more true, more beautiful.

One of the great things about going to Texas A&M is I was surrounded by people who grew up in very rural towns, I'll say that, and for me that was cultural experience. In college, my favorite thing to do was to go on road trips. We didn't care where it was, we just wanted to go on a road trip. So, in the dorm you would hear someone call out, "road trip" and all of us would just flood out and ask where is everyone running to and we will go into that car and we'll go. One of the road trips I had we were driving along on this highway and there were long, long fields across and being the person from an urban place, I looked at these fields and you know that experience where it just looks like it is just sporadic and random, but when you look perpendicular it is just straight rows everyone of them. It is just amazing how it is. The view looks like it is just random, but when you look at a certain direction it looks straight. So, being the urbanite that I am, I ask, "I wonder how come they make those lines so very straight, just goes on miles it looks like?" One of my friends, who grew up in a farm town, said, "The way that we do that is kind of simple, what do you think it is?" I said, "Well I would think that you would just look right on the other side of your tractor and you'd just keep on going after that same line." He said, "That is the actual opposite of what we do. **We find a point on the horizon and we just drive to it and we just don't stop and we just keep on driving to same point of in the distance, even though I know we are never going to get there, but we continue to drive towards it.**"



It is powerful message about what you allow your perspective and/or focus to be determines where you go in life. In allowing our perspective to be not on the here and now, but on the more eternal, the more constant I think allows our hearts and our eyes to be open to something more true and more great.

To summarize the rest of the story the rest of the story as we have read this morning, Elisha has his servant's eyes open and then they come to attack and Elisha prays for the second time, "Lord, close their eyes so that they may not see, blind them." They are blinded and Elisha and walks to them and says, "You're in the wrong place that you need to be, follow me." He takes them to Samaria, right to the doorstep of the enemy he was wanting to attack eventually. The king sees this and thinks of course this is God's plan for me to destroy them. "Lord, shall I kill them all?" Many of our views of the Old Testament, blood thirsty God might be like that. However, what we see here is God is God of forgiveness and grace throughout and He says, "No, don't slaughter them, instead prepare them a feast."

**This is a whole other message for us – is the power of grace and forgiveness and how it transforms people**, because ultimately what do these troops do. They go back home and they don't attack anyone.

But ok, so what. This is a great story, right? How it speaks to my life? Isn't that the Westlake mindset – what is the bottom line? Who cares? Great story – let's go to Luby's that is fine. So, how does this story speak into our life. For me if we are honest about this passage, I think it leaves us with a couple of really clear questions and for me the very honest question is: **How come I don't see more of this sort of stuff in my life? How come I don't engage this larger story more in my life?** Sure, I don't think I'm going to see something as dramatic as chariots of fire surrounding me all day long, I don't know if I even want to see that all day long. But how come I don't see more things more eternal, beautiful or things more grand and holy and majestic? How comes I don't see those more in my life? I'd like to suggest a couple of things for us to ponder as we close, a couple of questions for us to think about.

Why we might not experience this larger story more? One has to come through our longings. **Maybe we don't long for it enough. Maybe we don't truly long to see this larger story more and more. Maybe our hearts our divided.** Jesus in his famous Sermon on the Mount said this in Matthew 5:8, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God." This purity isn't just speaking about absence from sin, but this purity is about having a single-mindedness, being about one thing, having a heart that is about one thing. For those who have a heart and to know and to long and to be with God to enjoy Him forever that in this blessing that Jesus gives us, they will see God. I have to be honest with my heart, it is not single. I'd like to experience God, but I have other things that I'd like to experience as well. There is part of me that believes that if I fully give my heart over to God, I'm going to miss out on a lot of things. But, there is a blessedness in being single of heart, that your eyes might be open and you actually would experience a life that God has created for you.

For those of you in this room when you think about, do I long to see God? And, your honest answer is no, I just want to encourage you by saying that God is big enough for honesty and if your honest assessment of your heart is that you don't long to see Him, but encouragement for you would be to just pray. God I pray that you would give me the desire to desire you when I don't have it I pray that you give the ability, the longing for You, because I don't have it now. I think God is okay with our honesty, I think He is big enough for it, for you just to pray that God my heart is not for you right now, but I give you permission to change it.

So. the first reason we might not be experiencing this larger story is maybe we don't desire it.



**The second reason is, God might be waiting in the mundane.** He might be waiting for us in the day-to-day routine. So many of us long to see God and we think we are going to see it in the dramatic, in the exclamation marks of our life, but perhaps God is waiting for us in the midst of our daily routine.

Proverbs 1:20-21 says this

<sup>20</sup> Wisdom calls aloud in the street,  
she raises her voice in the public squares;  
<sup>21</sup> at the head of the noisy streets <sup>[a]</sup> she cries out,  
in the gateways of the city she makes her speech:

I imagine in this New York bustling street with everyone running twenty thousand different directions with their own difference purposes that wisdom is just simply standing there and calling upon anyone who is able to listen, in the midst of their plans, in the midst of their day-to-day life, that wisdom is awaiting those who are seeking it.

Proverbs 8 continues,

<sup>34</sup> Blessed is the man who listens to me,  
watching daily at my doors,  
waiting at my doorway.  
<sup>35</sup> For whoever finds me finds life  
and receives favor from the LORD.

There is blessedness to a heart that is listening to the Lord, seek Him.

Thomas Merton, a famous Catholic monk, said this quote, "Every moment and every event of every person's life on earth plants something in his soul. For just as the wind carries thousands of invisible and visible winged seeds, so the stream of time brings with it germs of spiritual vitality that come to rest imperceptibly in the minds and wills of men. Most of these unnumbered seeds perish and are lost, because men are not prepared to receive them."

**Our hearts might not be open to receive God in the mundane and there are thousands of seeds that come throughout of day.** Jesus speaks a similar parable in scattering the seeds and they feel a different soil. The interesting thing about that parable is that the seeds never changed, whether or not if flourished and grew wasn't dependent on the seed, that was the same in every different situation – it was depended on the quality of the soil, whether or not it was ready to receive that. In fertile soil, the interesting thing is that substance that is in fertile soil is humus. It is the organic, natural quality that some soil has that is able to grow things very easily. That word humus is the same root word where we have the word humble and for me I'm so humble I don't even pronounce the h, I just say umble – just kidding.

There is that humility. **A heart that is humble is one that is fertile to the Lord.** If you want to see God then you have to come to the acknowledgement that your heart needs to be teachable, that you've not yet arrived. When you have that humble heart you are able to receive, even in the mundane, the eyes to see God and His eternal presence here in this world. Having eyes to see God even in the mundane. Blessed is the poor in spirit for theirs the Kingdom of Heaven. So, we don't see God perhaps because we don't long for Him, we don't see Him perhaps He might be waiting for us in the mundane.



Lastly, we might not see God, we might see this larger story, because we don't like what He shows us. A lot of times I'll pray a prayer to show me something and He does and I pray the same prayer again. Show me something different. Answer that prayer in a different way, please, now. Sometimes we don't experience because our palate doesn't like it.

**The reality is one of the most blessed sacraments that we might experience in this life is the sacrament of our neighbor.** One of the blessed sacraments is the sacrament of your neighbor, the way that we the vehicle which we experience God might be in the person you are sitting next to, the person that you pass, the person that you work with, your actual neighbor, a family member. It might be in the child that you serve sacrificially. Jesus' presence might be there, your eyes could be open if you begin to experience that.

I went to seminary at Baylor and one of the last classes you take in seminary is called, "Classic Life and Work of the Pastor." Yes, that is only one semester that we study that – so, it answers a lot of questions about the quality of pastors you might experience. So, we have one semester of "Life and Work of the Pastor." The final exam that we are given, we were given two different options, it surprised all of us – we studied, we prepared, you know we read, we memorized and there are two different exams that we given. One was 50 questions, some were short answers, some were essays, some were multiple choices and the other option was one question – obviously all of us were like we'll take the one question please.

The one question after three years of being at this school, as you are about to graduate to the pastorate, whatever it might be, the question was this: "You've been here for three or more years at this seminary, what is the name of the janitor?" What that was is the real question. You've been here for years and there has been someone who has been serving you that maybe you've walked past, maybe you oversaw for three or more years that you've been here. What was their name? The reason why there is something to that question is that over and over again, Jesus has said that He would take the form of the lowly servant, that He is there among them. So, if we want to experience Him, we have to be aware of the face that He might show up in our day. That is not only for pastors, that is for all of us. Who is Jesus wanting to show you more about in your day and your time? We never know what form Jesus might take.

There are very few stories in popular culture that seem to be saturated with the Gospel more than this story I'll close with this – Les Miserable. The story is an amazing story about a personal transformation through the act of grace. Jean Valjean the main character was transformed through the gracious act of a priest in this story and at the very end of his life, the very closing of this musical, he sings this song as he is being called into heaven: "Take my hand and lead me to salvation. Take my love, for love is everlasting. And remember the truth that once was spoken, to love another person is to see the face of God."

Then the entire cast joins Jean Valjean, comes to middle of the stage and they make their final appeal to the audience and for those who have see it, it is a powerful moment and they say these words in closing, "Will you join in our crusade? Who will be strong and stand with me? Somewhere beyond the barricade, is there a world that you long to see?" Is there a world that you long to see? Are we content in experiencing the reality here or do we long the prayer that Elisha prayed for his servant, "Lord, open my eyes so I might see." This larger story, this truer reality here that is in my presence.



**Thankfully, Jesus was led to a hill, laid down His life so that we might have the hearts and our eyes opened up to experience and to know Him, that we might see this world as God sees it and that ultimately we would see Christ.**

Let's pray.

*Jesus we thank you for your sacrifice. We thank you that you have chosen to forgive us. Heal us not from a distance, but from the midst of suffering so that might know that we have companions in this moment. And, I do pray for us as a church and us as a community that you would open up our eyes that we might see our place in this world, our place in this community and that we would experience and see you more and more. I pray for humility. We pray for deserve and we pray this in your name. Amen.*

