

2 Kings 6:8-17

⁸Now when the king of Aram was waging war against Israel, he would make plans with his officials, saying, “My camp will be at such and such a place.”

⁹But the man of God would send a message to the king of Israel, saying, “Be careful when you pass this place because the Arameans are going down there.” ¹⁰So the king of Israel would send scouts to the place that the man of God had pointed out. So the man of God warned him, and he was kept safe—and not just once or twice.

¹¹The king of Aram was enraged because of this. He summoned his officials and said to them, “Won’t you tell me who of us is for the king of Israel?”

¹²One of his officials said, “No, my lord the king. It is Elisha, the prophet in Israel, who tells the king of Israel the words which you speak in your bedroom.”

¹³Then he said, “Go and see where he is. Then I’ll send men and capture him.”

He was told, “Dothan is where he is.”

¹⁴So he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They came at night and surrounded the city. ¹⁵When the man of God’s servant got up early and went out, there were soldiers, horses, and chariots surrounding the city. So his attendant said to Elisha, “Oh no, my lord! What will we do?”

¹⁶He answered, “Don’t be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”

¹⁷Then Elisha prayed and said, “O LORD, open his eyes so that he can see.” Then the LORD opened the servant’s eyes, and he saw that the hills were full of horses and chariots of fire, all around Elisha.

Outnumbered

I.

It was probably their regular morning routine. The two men got up early and climbed the steps of the city wall. They looked out over the surrounding landscape as the morning mists receded. One of the two simply leaned on his walking stick, saying nothing. His companion, as *he* looked out at the usually uninspiring landscape, was extremely agitated. Bordering on panic, he asked: “What will we do?”

Which one are you more like?

You heard the reading moments ago. You can figure out that the first man, leaning calmly on his walking stick, was Elisha. The other man, who was, to say the least, very nervous about their situation, was Elisha’s attendant. Let’s back up and review what had brought them to their current situation.

Today’s First Reading takes place in Israel, after the original kingdom of Israel was divided in two. The northern kingdom, still called Israel, had king after king that were not God-fearing. The king in the reading ruled after King Ahab, who had promoted the worship of Baal. Though these evil, godless kings never followed the true God, from time to time they would at least *listen* to some of what God’s prophets told them.

The king of Aram was out to annex the northern kingdom of Israel. He brought his armies into the land with the intention of capturing city after city of the northern kingdom. Most of all, he wanted to capture the king of Israel.

Time after time his plans were thwarted. Some how, some way, the king of Israel and his armies always seemed to know where the king of Aram was planning his next attack. It was infuriating. Aram’s forces outnumbered Israel’s, and Aram’s king intended to use the might of his army to conquer.

“The king of Aram was enraged because of this. He summoned his officials and said to them,

‘Won’t you tell me who of us is for the king of Israel?’” (2 Kings 6:11, EHV). Now the king of Aram probably wasn’t an atheist, exactly. He believed in gods—lots of gods. But he was a worldly man, first of all; he was pragmatic. The most obvious and realistic reason the king of Israel always seemed to spring his traps and escape was that *someone* inside his inner cabinet was leaking the most secret and sensitive intelligence information. This was treasonous. He couldn’t stand for it.

No doubt the king’s generals and other close confidants worshiped a bunch of different gods, too, and didn’t believe in the true God. Even so, they put their heads together. They were convinced that there was no intelligence leak among their group.

“One of his officials said, ‘No, my lord the king. It is Elisha, the prophet in Israel, who tells the king of Israel the words which you speak in your bedroom’” (2 Kings 6:12, EHV). Somehow they knew of Elisha. They knew that the king of Israel was getting more information than any one of them could leak.

“Then he said, ‘Go and see where he is. Then I’ll send men and capture him.’ He was told, ‘Dothan is where he is.’”¹⁴ So he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They came at night and surrounded the city” (2 Kings 6:13-14, EHV).

Isn’t this an interesting part of the narrative? The king of Aram has *just* been told that Elisha knew what was going on, even though no one was leaking information to him. Knowing that Elisha always kept the king of Israel one step ahead of him, the king of Aram *still* thought he could capture Elisha if he just sent a large enough force. No matter what God Elisha was getting his intel from, he would be outnumbered.

II.

That’s where we rejoin Elisha on top of the city walls as the morning mists receded. “When the man of God’s servant got up early and went out, there were soldiers, horses, and chariots surrounding the city. So his attendant said to Elisha, ‘Oh no, my lord! What will we do?’” (2 Kings 6:15, EHV).

So there are the two of them on top of the city walls. Elisha leans calmly on his walking stick as he looks over the surrounding landscape. His attendant looks also; the cleared ground outside the city walls is filled with the horses and chariots and armies of the king of Aram. He panics. They are outnumbered.

Back to the original question: which of the two are you?

You open your app and look at the balance of your bank account. Costs at Meijer haven’t gone *down* recently—only up. Costs to maintain and repair your car—and insure your car—have gone up, too. If you are lucky, you locked in your mortgage rate before the jump in interest rates, but repair costs are only going up. If you *weren’t* fortunate enough to lock those rates in, you might be an apartment dweller. Rent has gone up.

While all your *costs* have gone up, your income has not. You feel outnumbered.

On the healthcare front you are outnumbered, too. Insurance rates are increasing dramatically this year for many. If you have illnesses and medical conditions already, co-pays for prescriptions and doctor visits may have increased. But if you *don’t* have medical conditions, you still face increasing insurance premiums. What if you don’t have insurance and something catastrophic happens?

Those are just two areas. Every one of us might feel outnumbered by the situations we face in life in a different way.

“What will we do?” You have probably asked the question Elisha’s attendant asked many times over the course of your life. *How* have you asked it? In desperation? In panic?

Two weeks ago we spoke about the Armor of God as Paul presents it in Ephesians 6. Paul reminded us: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12, EHV).

The greatest problems of life aren't being outnumbered by an enemy force surrounding our city; they aren't the bank account that doesn't seem substantial enough to pay for the current costs; they aren't the costs of healthcare, or the illnesses or injuries or mental challenges you face every day. They come from Satan and his band of demons that challenge your faith every day—the spiritual forces of evil, as Paul calls them.

In a few minutes we will pray the Lord's Prayer in the service. Consider the Sixth Petition and Luther's explanation for it:

Lead us not into temptation.

What does this mean?

God surely tempts no one to sin, but we pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us or lead us into false belief, despair, and other great and shameful sins; and though we are tempted by them, we pray that we may overcome and win the victory.

Satan's chief strategy in his war against believers is to deceive us—to make us believe something that is not true. Over and over again he wants you to believe that God doesn't love you. Over and over again he encourages you to believe something about God that isn't true. Over and over again he pushes you to the brink of despair, like Elisha's attendant; he pushes you to believe that you are outnumbered.

III.

"What will we do?" As his attendant went into full panic mode, Elisha just stood there calmly and quietly, leaning on his walking stick. How *could* he be so calm in the face of such imminent disaster?

"He answered, 'Don't be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them'" (2 Kings 6:16, EHV). I wonder if the attendant thought Elisha must be at least a bit delusional. Maybe, at least, Elisha was fatalistic—he must believe his time had come to go to God in heaven. Outnumbered as they were, there was no hope.

"Then Elisha prayed and said, 'O LORD, open his eyes so that he can see.' Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he saw that the hills were full of horses and chariots of fire, all around Elisha." (2 Kings 6:17, EHV).

Elisha had been able to remain calm even while his attendant was in full panic mode because he saw something the attendant could not. His eyes of faith could see God's protecting angels all around him. Elisha and his attendant were not outnumbered at all. God was with them. God had sent angels and horses and chariots of fire. God's angels would protect Elisha and his attendant from any potential threat.

IV.

Have you seen angels?

Long ago, before I had graduated from the Seminary, I knew a woman who said she had seen angels. She was suffering from Leukemia, and had several near-death experiences. On one such occasion, she said the angels appeared to her and said: "Go back. You're not yet finished." "Did I really see angels?" she asked, "Or was it all just my imagination?"

Remember that angels will not tell you anything that conflicts with or violates what the Scriptures say. In her case, the angels told her she still had things to do in this life before entering heaven. That was true, because she was still alive; God hadn't taken her to heaven. In the end, it doesn't matter whether she actually saw angels or imagined them—what she heard was the truth; she was still alive and there was more for her to do.

If you, like me, are one who has never seen even a vision or dream of angels, we can look to accounts from the Bible like our sermon text today. Like Elisha's attendant as he first stood on the city walls, we can't see them. But they are there. God sends his angels for us to watch over us every

day. We might *feel* outnumbered, but the truth is, with God and his angels on our side, we are *never* outnumbered.

The Second Reading from today talked about the battle between Michael and the good angels against Satan and his evil angels. Satan and his demons were thrown down. John reports the loud voice from heaven saying: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ, because the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, the one who accuses them before our God day and night. “They conquered him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony” (Revelation 12:10-11, EHV).

The blood of the Lamb—the sacrifice of Jesus for the sins of the whole world—means that any deception or accusation Satan brings against you and me is of no effect. Jesus already paid for every sin. Whenever that message of the gospel is proclaimed, Satan is defeated. We are not outnumbered because Satan has been thrown down by Jesus.

Perhaps in the past you have faced life like Elisha’s attendant, wondering “What will we do?” because you feel overwhelmed and outnumbered. Remember always that God’s angels surround you and protect you against the Devil’s schemes. You are outnumbered no more. Amen.